

Community Involvement and the Reuse of Rail Rights-Of-Way

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By

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Abstract

Given the scarcity of land in New York City, obtaining property for construction of parks, transit, schools or any other civic function is extremely costly, achieved either through expensive land acquisition or eminent domain. Abandoned rail rights-of-way (ROW) are one potential source of inexpensive land available to municipalities; because of their linear nature they are of particular significance for transportation reuse. This thesis examines how community involvement affects the reuse of rail rights-of-way in New York City through case studies of three rail rights-of-way: The Rockaway Beach Branch in Queens, Staten Island North Shore Line, and the Regional Plan Association's proposed Triboro Rx alignment (in Brooklyn, Queens, and the Bronx). It finds that while the context may vary, some generalizations can be made. Effective community involvement processes, coalition building, and political understanding are useful tools in presenting a right-of-way reuse proposal as necessary or fait accompli. However, community involvement is insufficient on its own as a tool for advancing grassroots proposals given the realpolitik nature of New York City infrastructure planning, especially for large-scale transit projects.

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Introduction

The Reuse of Rail Rights-of-Way is Contentious

Given land's finite nature and scarcity, it follows that land use in dense cities is a contentious issue. This is true for private projects on privately held land, but it is particularly true for public projects or projects on public land. Given the scarcity of land, obtaining property for construction of parks, transit, schools or any other civic function is extremely costly, achieved either through expensive land acquisition or eminent domain. Abandoned rail rights-of-way (ROW) are one potential source of inexpensive land available to municipalities; because of their linear nature they are of particular significance for transportation reuse.

Yet, while the reuse of a rail line may appeal to transit planners given its relatively inexpensive cost compared to new construction, all relevant actors do not necessarily share these priorities. These include the residents of the city, both those living in close proximity to the ROW as well as those throughout the city that might benefit from transit, the politicians that represent these groups of residents, community groups, non-profits, and local, state, and federal government. Potential options for reuse of rail ROW may include parks, transit, development, or continuation of the status quo; each of these sets of actors may prioritize reuse options differently, including variations within groups (e.g. politicians from different parties or areas may support different options).

The problem that this thesis will address is that consensus between residents (often organized as community groups) and government/non-government actors on the proper use of abandoned ROW is difficult to achieve due to their very different priorities and values. These differences are influenced by scale, as a decision that is beneficial on the regional scale may have

adverse impacts at the local scale. Demographics and historical development patterns may also contribute to actors' opinions on the proper use or reuse of ROW.

Understanding how people, organizations, and governments value scarce resources such as ROW is important in prioritizing cities' growth and development. Because of the scarcity of ROW and the need for contiguous corridors for transit development, any decision on ROW land use is extremely permanent and practically irreversible. The question of how to use these ROWs is critically important in shaping the cities of tomorrow; transit, freight, and urban parks are just a few of the critical components that are necessary for livable and sustainable cities. How cities prioritize the use of scarce land may reflect cities' municipal goals, the goals of citizens, or some combination of the two. This thesis investigates how community and political involvement affect municipal and agency decision making for rail ROWs. An understanding of the complex dynamics at play in these decisions is of use to planners and citizens alike: either as a component of the planning process for the reuse of ROW, as a means of designing the planning process itself, or by citizens as a means of holding municipalities and agencies accountable to their desires. Even in contentious cases with multiple community viewpoints and disparate agency goals, a working knowledge of how these issues have played out in the past can be of use in determining what constitutes a desirable outcome (and how to achieve it). For planners, knowing how to solicit and weigh different groups' opinions and values is imperative to effective and just decision-making.

Scope

This thesis will examine this issue in the context of New York City, using three local examples as a prism for understanding these issues. The three rights-of-way are the Rockaway Beach Branch (RBB) in Queens, the North Shore Line on Staten Island, and an amalgamation of

connected lines in Brooklyn, Queens, and the Bronx, dubbed the Triboro Rx by the Regional Plan Association (RPA). Proposals have been made by community groups, non-profits, and politicians for the reuse of each of these lines: proposals for parks, transit and the status quo for the RBB, and for transit on the North Shore Line and Triboro Rx. These particular ROW were chosen as proposals because they are at different stages in the process from proposal to implementation: the Triboro Rx is solely a concept, the RBB is the subject of competing visions and no common community consensus exists, and the North Shore Line has gone through a public participation process and yet is currently unfunded.

Research Question

In order to understand how support and opposition for different ROW reuse options form and manifest, the research question for this thesis is:

“Given the scarcity and value of rights-of-way for transit use, how do community groups organize around the reuse of rail rights-of-way and how do these groups influence the discussion and/or advocate for their preferred outcomes?

Additionally, once support/opposition to a particular reuse option is apparent, how are decisions made about abandoned ROW?

This thesis will attempt to answer these research questions, and provide evidence as to how proposals for ROW reuse are evaluated and supported/opposed at the community, organizational, and government levels. It will examine how different groups interact with each other on the topic of ROW reuse and how government and agency actions are affected by community involvement.

Background

Rights-of-Way as a Unique Resource

Urban land is a finite commodity. Once a property is improved for one purpose, its value for other purposes is generally negligible. Competing municipal priorities dictate the disposition of publicly owned properties, and these priorities are a result of both internal government action as well as external influence from the public, organizations, and other government actors (internal or external). As such, public governments and agencies must weigh multiple competing needs against each other in deciding if and how to use governmental property to advance public interests. As opposed to an occupied or vacant development parcel, rail rights-of-way possess special value due to their linear nature. Surface transportation usage is impossible without a linear right-of-way; an unconnected series of parcels has no transportation value. But when parcels are assembled linearly for transportation purposes, the value of the combined parcels is greater than the sum of their individual values (Wayne 2012). In cases where rights-of-way exist due to easement, public value exists only for the uses for which an easement has been granted (e.g. for rail service, telecommunications use, etc.) otherwise the land reverts to the landowner (Simpson 2007). In siting new transportation uses or choosing between establishing a new ROW or reusing an existing ROW, reusing an existing ROW is almost invariably both quicker and less expensive (Rahn 1999). This economy is due to three primary factors: 1) the optics of aboveground rail reactivation vs. establishing a ROW; 2) the high financial and time costs of eminent domain necessary to establish a new ROW; and 3) the difference in cost between above-ground and subterranean construction. In most cases, it more politically palatable to restore service to a formerly active rail line than to install a new one. Establishing a new-at grade ROW requires coming to agreements for sale or use of property with all property owners along the route, or failing that, condemnation of land through eminent domain and the payment of just

compensation. In dense urban areas, the negative externalities (noise especially) of aboveground rail make the creation of new aboveground rail lines politically unpopular¹, while the high costs of subterranean tunneling may make an underground line cost prohibitive. For these reasons, abandoned ROW are extremely appealing for transit reactivation.

City Needs

Reuse of abandoned rights-of-way may address any number of public and private needs. Proposals for projects may come from private interests or be initiated by public sector actors. This section provides background on potential reuse options for ROW in New York City, based on identified needs and desires.

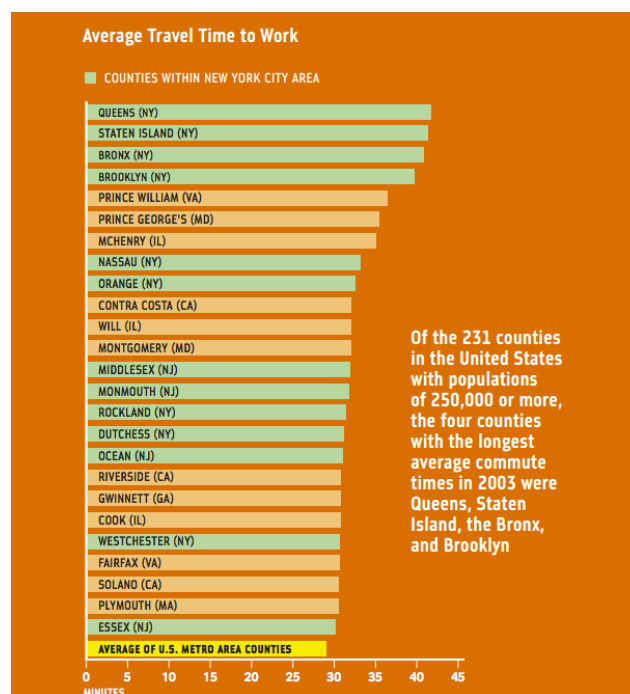


Figure 1. Average Travel Time to Work (OLTPS 2007)

¹ A good example of this phenomenon is the Giuliani-era plan to extend the elevated BMT Astoria Line from Astoria-Ditmars to LaGuardia Airport. The plan was shelved after fierce opposition from residents and politicians concerned about noise from the elevated line.

There is an undeniable need for increased transit connections and capacity in New York City. Ridership is at near record levels, and many lines are over-capacity. New York City's subway system provides efficient service from much of the outer-boroughs to Manhattan but there are large gaps in the network. Both the RPA and the Department of City Planning have cited a need for increased inter-outer-borough connections in order to connect workers with areas of increasing job growth in the outer boroughs. Of particular note to this thesis is the difficulty of reaching the Rockaway Peninsula in Queens; travel times in Queens are the highest of any borough, and in 2003 were the highest in the nation for counties of larger than 250,000 residents (New York City Department of City Planning [DCP] 2010) (New York City Office of Long Term Planning and Sustainability [OLTPS] 2007).

This has been a political issue for many years, most recently focused on the on-again off-again Rockaway ferry service, as well as discussions about toll rates on the Rockaway bridges. Over the years, multiple options have been floated for speeding service from the Rockaways. Since Super Storm Sandy, the Rockaways have received greater attention than in the past given the disproportionate damage that the peninsula suffered.

Just as the need for transit increases with population growth and increased density, so does the need for parks and green space. Identifying land for large-scale parks is difficult in already developed neighborhoods, and in many cases areas that are lacking for green space tend to be lacking for vacant land as well. PlaNYC set a standard for parkland measured by how long it takes a resident to walk to the nearest park. According to PlaNYC, ideally each resident should be within a ten-minute walk of a park (New York City Office of Long Term Planning and Sustainability [OLTPS] 2013). At present, many parts of New York City do not meet this goal.

This includes parts of Southern Queens located along the Rockaway Beach Branch. Friends of the QueensWay estimates that there are 0.21 acres of parkland per 1,000 residents in Southern Queens where the City Planning uses 2.5 acres per 1,000 residents as a benchmark; however the plan does not explain how this figure was computed (Friends of the QueensWay 2014, Play + Health) While nearly any piece of land can be used for parkland, the value of parkland increases with size. There is now a history of converting abandoned ROW to park use with rails to trails being a common typology in rural and suburban areas. The High Line, in Manhattan, is probably the best-known example of an urban ROW that has been converted to a park use in New York City, and will be covered in greater detail.

Another potential use for abandoned ROW is freight rail. The same density and population conditions that drive the need for additional transit service and green space lead to increasing freight demands. Currently, most freight is shipped into New York City by truck (Federal Highway Administration/Port Authority of New York New Jersey [FHA/PA] 2014). This is because there are no rail freight facilities in Manhattan, and limited access to rail freight in the Bronx, Brooklyn, and Queens. At present, there is no rail link from the west side of New York Harbor (where the major shipping hubs lie) to the east side of the harbor (where intermodal facilities exist); for freight to travel by rail from West to East, it must first travel 140 miles north to the first available rail bridge at Selkirk, NY, this is known as the “Selkirk Hurdle.” Currently there is limited rail float capacity from New Jersey to Brooklyn, and the Port Authority is planning for either a tunnel or increased float capacity through the Cross Harbor Freight Program, the draft EIS of which is currently in the comment period (FHA/PA 2014). These factors are of importance in analyzing the reuse potential of any ROW, but are of particular relevance to the Triboro Rx plan, which anticipates reusing or sharing “underutilized” freight

ROW, or building new tracks alongside existing freight service (Regional Plan Association 1996). Use of ROW for freight use also engages with dialogues about street safety and air quality. Concerns about diesel truck emissions as well as the risk of collision often make rail freight a more environmentally friendly option than truck freight. However, there are many cases of communities organizing against rail over noise concerns as well as diesel emissions, especially around 24/7 rail yards.

Private reuse of rail ROW is also possible, but these uses tend not to take advantage of the linear nature of the property. In many cases, after abandonment a ROW may be parceled off and lose its linear character. There is no limit to possible private ROW uses, the entire range of development opportunities for traditional parcels apply to subdivided ROW. One example of this is the Evergreen Branch in Bushwick, Brooklyn, which was abandoned and has been parceled off, with buildings erected on some lots while others lie vacant. The Rockaway Beach Branch itself has seen a number of interim uses since the discontinuation of rail service, these include parking for a condominium development, use as part of a little league field, and auto-body shops and similar uses below the viaduct in the southern section (Michael Miller, *interview*).

As is evident, once a ROW is used for one option, it is nearly impossible to use it for any other purpose. As such, nearly all of the possible reuse options for ROW are mutually exclusive. The exclusivity of use that is associated with real estate and the increased value of ROW due to their linear nature combine to make decisions about ROW reuse contentious.

Planning and Funding Jurisdictions

The control of ROW property in New York City as well as planning for that property is context-sensitive. Property ownership varies, parcels may be held by either the City of New York or the Metropolitan Transportation Authority. Planning responsibility rests with both landowners

as well as with government at varying scales. There is no comprehensive planning process for the disposition of rail rights-of-way, instead planning tends to take place on an ad-hoc project-by-project basis. Major agency actors include the Metropolitan Transportation Authority, and City agencies including the Department of City Planning, Department of Parks & Recreation, and Department of Citywide Administrative Services.

The Metropolitan Transportation Authority (MTA) operates most transit in New York City through its operating agencies. As such, it is the driving force behind transit expansion in the region. Presently, the MTA is seeking funding for its 2015-2019 Capital Program, at a cost of over \$30 billion, of which only half is currently funded (Associated Press 2015). The Authority's *Twenty-Year Capital Needs Assessment*, does mention abandoned ROW as one potential option for increasing outer-borough connectivity, however the recent capital plan does not identify any projects for which abandoned ROW would be used (Metropolitan Transportation Authority 2014).

At the City level, the Department of City Planning, the Department of Transportation, the Department of Parks & Recreation, and the Department of Citywide Administrative Services all have some involvement with ROW and planning for reuse. Whatever the purpose for reuse, planning for ROW reuse is within the realm of the Department of City Planning (DCP). For transportation purposes, the Department of Transportation has the option to engage in transportation planning, though the agency's principal area of focus is in surface transit. The Department of Parks & Recreation is the lead agency for park planning, and owns a seven-acre portion of the Rockaway Beach Branch in Forest Park, Queens. Finally, the Department of Citywide Administrative Services owns and manages portions of the City's landholdings

including the Rockaway Beach Branch. All of the City agencies are part of the executive branch and ultimately report to the Mayor's Office.

Examples of ROW Reuse in NYC

There are a number of abandoned rail rights-of-way in New York City, some of which remain abandoned and others that have been reused. Abandoned rail lines may lie completely fallow like the Port Morris Branch in the Bronx or the Rockaway Beach Branch in Queens, or they may have been parceled out for development, as was the Evergreen Branch in Brooklyn. In the city's early history many private rail lines were converted to transit use and eventually became part of the unified subway system.

The best-known reuse of a rail right-of-way for park use in New York City is the High Line in Manhattan. The High Line was originally an elevated freight line running down the West side of Manhattan, serving warehouses and distribution businesses; in some cases the line travelled through buildings, providing direct access for loading and unloading. Unused for transport since the 1980's (but not technically abandoned), the High Line was nearly torn down during the Giuliani administration and it was only in 1999 that people began talking about creating a linear park on the structure. As portrayed in the mythology of the High Line, Friends of the Highline was founded at a community meeting in Chelsea, and through fundraising and a public process convinced the city to obtain the right-of-way and allow for the creation of a park. Since its creation the park has been credited with increasing property values along its length and according to some, further gentrifying surrounding neighborhoods (Loughran 2014).

Literature Review

While much has been written on the effects of multi-use paths/greenways and transit access on residents and cities; little has been written specifically on how community support or opposition impact how ROW are reused, and what options are considered for their reuse.

In the United States, economic forces drive the vast majority of rail right-of-way abandonments; once a ROW is unprofitable it is abandoned. Abandonment is a legal term that applies when a railroad petitions the government to relinquish its control of a ROW, and can take different forms depending on the means by which the railroad came to occupy the ROW.² Once a railway is abandoned it may immediately be reused, or it may lay fallow for many years, depending on its ownership and the political climate.

Generally speaking, the two most common reuses for abandoned ROW are as trails/greenways and for the reactivation of rail service (either freight, commuter, or transit). Morgan and Warner detail a range of examples of reuse that exist in Texas, including trails, freight, transit, and highways (Morgan and Warner 2013).

It is not necessarily a binary choice between rails and trails when contemplating the reuse of an abandoned ROW. The United States Department of Transportation has published recommendations about how to integrate the two options, giving rise to “Rails-with-Trails,” and its guidance lays out the many barriers to implementation that do exist (liability concerns, mismatched incentives, etc.) (US DOT 2002). Most recently in terms of the QueensWay,

² In cases where the railroad owns the land outright, they may sell or give it to government, another rail carrier, or parcel it off and sell it. In cases where the ROW is owned by private landowners (or the government) and used via an easement, the land reverts to the owner once it is abandoned. In some cases, ROW established by easement can be preserved for future reuse through railbanking, which allows for the easement to remain in trust for future use even though service is not being run on the line, many rail trails use this model with the presumption that rail service will resume at some point in the future.

Andrew Sparberg, a transportation professional and writer has called for the study of Rails-with-Trails as a potential option for reuse (Sparberg 2014).

Understanding the benefits and dis-benefits of potential ROW reuse options is helpful in understanding why supporters or opponents of various projects mobilize. In terms of trail use, Racca and Dhanju provide a broad overview of the current research and find that bike paths/greenways tend to result in no significant or slight increases in property values for properties adjacent to these facilities (2006). They find no merit in concerns about increased crime in these areas, finding that crime is minimal and is predominantly confined to littering, illegal motor vehicle use, and disruptive noise (Racca and Dhanju 2006). Racca and Dhanju conducted a hedonic price model using data from Delaware and found a 4% increase in home values for properties adjacent to greenways (2006). This is in keeping with research by Asabare and Huffman, which found, using data from Bexar County, Texas, that trails, greenbelts, and greenways (trails within greenbelts) added 2%, 4%, and 5% respectively to the value of adjacent homes.

In contradiction to Racca and Dhanju, Noelwah Netusil (2003) found, using a hedonic price model, that in Portland Oregon, properties within 200 feet of a trail exhibited a 6.81% lower sale price than comparable properties. The accompanying summary report from the City of Portland Bureau of Planning (which funded the study) notes that this result may reflect the type of trail included in the study, specifically rail trails through industrial areas.

The health benefits of trails and greenways are another factor that often drives rails to trails efforts. Cohen et. al. (2007), finds that the distance to parks is a predictor of both the level of park use and the level of exercise activity of area residents, especially in low-income areas.

Gibbons and Machin (2004) found that transit stations increase home values, estimating a 9.3% increase in value for homes in London with access to transit over those without transit access. Bowes and Ihlanfeldt (2001) find that in Atlanta, transit stations have both positive effects and negative externalities when it comes to residential development and home values as well as crime. They found that homes within a ¼ mile of transit stations declined in value, while stations between 1 and 3 miles increased significantly in value compared to those either closer or farther from stations. They attribute this decline for homes immediately adjacent to transit to the negative externalities associated with transit stations, especially crime, which they found occurred at higher rates in census tracts within ¼ mile of stations (Bowes and Ihlanfeldt 2001). The significant increase in value for homes in the intermediate distance is attributed to these homes obtaining the benefit of transit access without the negative externalities associated with the station itself.

The reuse of ROW for transportation purposes, be it commuter rail or transit, yields concrete transportation benefits in addition to increases in property value. By shortening distances between origins and destinations, residents and businesses can access larger catchment areas, either saving travel time or increasing opportunities for employment or economic activity.

The land-use transportation link is especially important when it comes to the reuse of abandoned ROW for rail service. Allen (2001) raises the point that the availability of abandoned freight ROW is not necessarily a panacea for fulfilling transit needs because land uses around freight ROW are traditionally industrial in nature. As a counterpoint to the work of Gibbons and Machin as well as Bowes, Allen makes the point that complementary zoning and strong market conditions are necessary if transit reuse seeks to spur economic development (Allen 2001)

Theories of government decision making and citizen participation are integral to understanding how community support or opposition inform (or dictate, in cases of true citizen engagement) how abandoned rail ROW are reused.

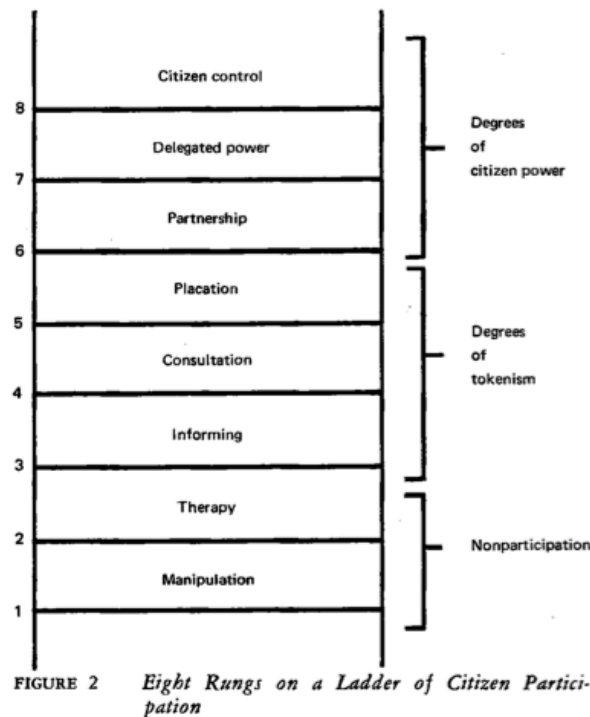


Figure 2. Arnstein's (1969) Ladder of Citizen Participation

Arnstein's "Ladder of Citizen Participation" is one tool for understanding how closely involved citizens are in the decision-making process, from total non-participation to full citizen control (Arnstein 1969). Arnstein writes about the difference between citizens being heard and citizens being heeded in public participation processes, and nearly fifty years after its publication it remains a useful topology for characterizing public outreach. Given top-down planning paradigms at the city and authority levels, agency and authority public outreach processes rarely exceed the "Tokenism" category, especially when it comes to large-scale transit network planning.

Theories of political power and agency decision making determine to what extent citizen support or opposition influences decisions about the use of physical space. Dahl's *Who Governs?* provides one model of political decision making, where interest groups compete for influence and government actions are the result of pluralistic cooperation and conflict (Dahl 1961). Bickerstaff and Walker write about the interplay between public participation and decision-making in English transport planning, finding that in many cases "that civic deliberations are failing to deliver significant changes in prevailing practices of local transport planning" (Bickerstaff and Walker 2005, 2139).

Bent Flyvbjerg's "Bringing Power to Planning Research" (2002) and *Rationality and Power: Democracy in Practice* (1998) both speak about the importance of planners understanding how power manifests itself in decision making. Building on Machiavelli and Foucault, Flyvbjerg examines how power and rationality interact and espouses a methodology for examining issues of power that he calls "phronetic planning research." He poses four value-rational questions for phronetic planning researchers: "(1) Where are we going with planning? (2) Who gains and who loses, and by which mechanisms of power? (3) Is this development desirable? (4) What should be done?" (Flyvbjerg 2002, 353). In the case of Flyvbjerg's work in Aalborg, Denmark, the author becomes a participant, sharing his work with the media and the local planning department to affect change in practice. These questions can be used to shed light on how power manifests itself in discussions and decisions regarding the reuse of rail rights-of-way.

A gulf between citizen and agency priorities and worldviews may be one potential reason for a perceived disconnect between local input and agency decision-making. Eckerd explores how the public and public administrators characterize risk differently; he posits that citizens

focus on “risks specific to themselves...[and] that risk is best avoided” while administrators take a wider view and believe that “risk is something to manage” (Eckerd 2014, 617). In his view, this incongruence between input and outcomes is a product of how risk is managed and conceived. This speaks to the concept of NIMBY-ism, which by its nature focuses on the very local effects of land use actions while ignoring regional needs.

Another potential factor in determining how abandoned ROW are reused are the tools that agencies and government actors use for decision-making. Bruinsma *et. al.*’s book, *Railway Development: Impacts on urban dynamics*, describes a number of these tools, including Cost-Benefit Analysis (CBA), Social Cost-Benefit Analysis (SCBA) and Multi-Criteria Decision Analysis. These range from the quantitative CBA, which seeks to monetize and weigh the impacts and effects of a proposal, to the somewhat more qualitative MCDA which seeks to evaluate multiple actors’ priorities and determine the option that satisfies the most actors (this can be weighted as well). Differing evaluation tools will provide very different results given the same dataset.

Planning and agency goals provide the framework in which these tools are used, and may drive the selection of a particular evaluation rubric. Stich and Miller (2011) explore how economic development perspectives influence ROW reuse decisions. They find that when it comes to public investments in ROW, the “worldview” through which the project is viewed affects how competing options are evaluated. They define three worldviews: Friedman’s flat worldview, which requires infrastructure to minimize the importance of place in economic development; Florida’s “creative class” worldview that posits that economic development is predicated on attracting and retaining the creative class”; and a localism view that prioritizes closed-system economies that can prevent wealth from leaving a local economy. Interestingly,

they state that the perspective chosen can influence the results of “technical” evaluation tools such as cost benefit analysis. Stich and Miller advocate for public administrators to act as “agents...for a variety of principals, including the public interest,” which is a similar view to that of Dahl who sees government as a mediator between competing interest groups (Stich and Miller 2011, 439).

Understanding the impetus behind a proposal for ROW reuse is also important; some proposals stem from the abandonment of the right-of-way itself while others may be part of a broader plan. Many examples of railbanking are driven by the proposed abandonment of a ROW: if a temporary greenway is not put in place immediately the property would revert to the original property owners, eliminating the chances for reuse as either a greenway or revitalization as a rail line. Simpson describes how railbanking is used to buy time for more involved studies of permanent greenways or revitalized rail lines (Simpson 2007). These sorts of projects offer significant chance for citizen involvement, and oftentimes are spearheaded by grassroots “Friends of” groups (Simpson 2007).

Transit or parks agency-driven projects exhibit different characteristics of citizen participation. Especially in the case of transit projects, overarching transit system needs drive the reuse of ROW. Elkind writes about the route selection process for Los Angeles’ Metro Blue Line, a case where the origin and destination were selected and then an abandoned ROW was chosen as a route to limit costs (Elkind 2014). In this case, the decision to create the rail line predates the choice of the alignment along the abandoned ROW. This provides two typologies of ROW reuse, 1) abandonment driven, and 2) project driven.

These project-based, agency-backed, ROW reuse proposals tend to result in citizen participation that is reminiscent of what Arnstein would characterize as “degrees of tokenism”

(Informing, Consultation, Placation) (Arnstein 1969, 217). Bates discusses a variety of participation techniques utilized in planning expansion of the San Diego Trolley system, ranging from public hearings and information sessions to a citizens' advisory committee; she found that in many instances a robust public participation process may lead to easier project implementation (Bates 1997).

In framing the conversation about the reuse of rail rights-of-way for park use, the High Line is a common point of comparison for both the public and the academy. Kevin Loughran (2014) in "Parks for Profit: The High Line, Growth Machines, and the Uneven Development of Urban Public Spaces" argues that the High Line is the product of the "growth machine" as defined by Harvey Molotch (1976); where elites band together to pursue policies that advance their interests and fortifies their capital. In this conception, the High Line is advanced as a neoliberal "elite, privatized space" that seeks to increase property values for moneyed interests at the expense of parks and facilities in poorer areas (Loughran 2014, 50).

The High Line as neoliberal growth machine, and whether the model might apply to the QueensWay, is the topic of Scott Larson's forthcoming "A High Line for Queens: Celebrating Diversity or Displacing It?" Larson argues that the High Line model is incompatible with Friends of the QueensWay's stated goals of preserving community cultural character. Instead, the top-down nature of the QueensWay plan and stated goal of economic growth will in fact remake the neighborhood in the elites' neoliberal image, leading to the displacement of low-income renters who are predominantly people of color (Larson, *not yet released*).

Research Design

The research design for this thesis was driven by the research question: "given the scarcity and value of rights-of-way for transit use, how do community groups organize around

the reuse of rail rights-of-way and how do these groups influence the discussion and/or advocate for their preferred outcomes?

In order to answer this question, three rights-of-way for which reuse proposals exist were chosen as case studies. Being three very different projects at different stages from conception to implementation, these three case studies provide insight into how these issues are addressed in New York City.

By comparing these cases studies against each other, as well as relevant cases from outside New York City, specific and generalizable conclusions can be drawn about how community involvement affects the reuse of rail rights-of-way. The three case study analyses draw on a wide range of written sources as well as targeted interviews.

Ascertaining the current state of each proposal began with a survey of all planning documents that have been released for each ROW, either by relevant agencies or by non-profit groups that are lobbying for their preferred outcome. A close reading of these provides the basis for understanding what options have been presented in the public forum, and they provide the framework in which most of the public discourse about these ROW has taken place. In addition to the planning documents, non-profit and agency websites were scoured for information relevant to these proposals; in the case of the Rockaway Beach Branch, thequeensway.org is a major component of the Friends of the QueensWay's public outreach campaign. News media was also consulted in order to gain an understanding of the media climate surrounding each proposal. Searches using news.google.com and ProQuest were used to obtain historical print and web articles about the proposals using a variety of search terms, while media sources were monitored for current stories during the course of this project. A literature review was conducted, using the Columbia Libraries' online search tool as well as Google Scholar. This review of

scholarly literature included writings on larger issues of community involvement, the effects of ROW reuse, theories of government and agency decision-making, and additional relevant topics as covered in the literature review.

Agency and New York State Government reports and official transcripts and minutes were consulted in order to understand the legislative and governmental context in which ROW proposals exist. Transcripts from select State Assembly and State Senate committees were downloaded from their respective websites and searched for proposal specific key-phrases.

With a suitable backgrounding in the news media and official discourse, 15 interviews were conducted in order to gain an in-depth understanding about specific proposals and how community involvement affects outcomes. Interviews were conducted with leaders of community groups, representatives of non-profits, elected officials, agency officials, and academics. Interviewees were initially sourced through organization websites (for organizations that had been identified in the background review), either through direct email contact or through indirect central organization email addresses. Subsequent interviewees were recommended by initial interviewees, and in some cases, interviewees made initial introductions. All interviewees were interviewed in their official capacities as outlined in the research proposal that was submitted to Institutional Review Board (IRB); upon review this proposal was declared exempt as it did not qualify as human subjects testing.

Interviews were semi-unstructured in nature. Initial questions were prepared for each interviewer, based on a series of generic questionnaires that were developed (e.g. one for agencies, one for non-profits, one for community groups, etc.). If requested, these questions were provided in advance to the interviewee. Each interview would begin with a brief overview of the

thesis topic to set the stage. The prepared questions were used to guide the conversation while follow-up questions were asked to illuminate certain points or explore new avenues of inquiry.

Paper notes were taken for all interviews; two interviews were also audio-recorded. Upon completion of each interview, these paper notes were transcribed and additional remembered detail added to produce final interview notes. During the note-taking process, most notes describe the interviewees' comments, while direct quotes were marked as such using quotation marks. Direct quotes are indicated by quotation marks this document.

ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

THE ROCKAWAY BEACH BRANCH

History

The Long Island Rail Road's (LIRR) Rockaway Beach Branch (RBB) is a 3.5 mile long abandoned right-of-way running from White Pot Junction in Rego Park, Queens to Liberty Avenue in Ozone Park, Queens. The line in its original configuration connected the LIRR Main Line to Far Rockaway, continuing east to Jamaica through Nassau County. Built in the late 1800s, it was sold to the New York City Transit Authority in 1955, which integrated the section from Ozone Park to Far Rockaway into the IND system, and leased the remaining 3.5-mile section back to the LIRR. Train service between Ozone Park and White Pot Junction ceased in 1962 due to unprofitability.



Figure 3. Rockaway Beach Branch ROW (WXY and dlandstudio)

Since then, the line has been largely neglected, with many sections overgrown by vegetation, and elevated structures and bridges in decrepit condition. The ROW is owned by the City of New York, and the Department of Citywide Administrative Services manages current uses. At

present, portions of the RBB are used for non-transportation purposes. Auto body shops and similar small-businesses (welders, contractors, etc.) lease space below the viaduct in Ozone Park, while a school bus company leases space for parking along what was once the junction between the Rockaway Beach Branch and Atlantic Branch. In Forest Hills, a section of the ROW is currently used for little league ball fields, while just south of the ball fields a section of the ROW is part of a Home Depot parking lot. South of Union Parkway, part of the ROW has been paved over to provide parking for a condominium development. The section of the Rockaway Beach Branch that runs through Forest Park totals seven acres in size and has been ceded to the Parks Department, there is no direct access to the ROW from the rest of the park due to fencing (though the fence is damaged or missing in numerous locations.)

Recent History

Plans for reuse of the rail line for transit have circulated since the line's deactivation. The Queens College *Rockaway Beach Branch Community Impact Study*, which examined the potential effects of a linear park or rebuilt rail line, tallied six proposals since 1996. None of these proposals gained much traction and the MTA has not indicated that reactivation of the rail line is a priority.³ Proposals for a greenway or linear park along the RBB have also circulated in the past. In 2004, Queens Community Board 9 passed a resolution calling for a greenway, but was unsuccessful in convincing other community boards and city government to support a plan.

Recently, a plan to reuse the RBB ROW as a linear park has pushed the line into the spotlight. Called the QueensWay, the proposed park would stretch the entire length of the ROW. As promoted by its principal champions, the Trust for Public Land and Friends of the

³ In 2001 an MTA study found that reactivating the line would not improve travel times for Rockaway residents, while in 2014 the *Twenty-Year Capital Needs Assessment* devoted one line to the possibility of reusing rail rights-of-way.

QueensWay, the ROW would be converted to a “21st-century linear park for the borough and the City” (Trust for Public Land 2014) and a “destination...and cultural greenway” (Queens College 2014, 17). In October of 2014, Friends of the QueensWay released *The QueensWay Plan*, a feasibility study that laid out a vision for the ROW. This was the result of an extensive public outreach campaign and lays the groundwork for future planning efforts. In December of 2014, the Trust for Public Land and Friends of the QueensWay were awarded a Regional Economic Development Council grant to fund design of the northern section of the park.

The efforts of the Friends of the QueensWay and Trust for Public Land has re-energized rail transit advocates, who are currently engaged in a concurrent campaign to reactivate rail service on the Rockaway Beach Branch. While there is no discreet proposal for rail reactivation, advocates have been meeting with elected officials and community boards in the hopes of building a coalition.

While pro-park and pro-rail advocates have been pushing their agendas in the public forum and at multiple levels of city and state government, they have both encountered resistance in the form of local residents and politicians who oppose both proposals. Much of the opposition to reactivation of the RBB for either purpose has been centered in Woodhaven, where NoWay QueensWay has agitated against both proposals, and where the Woodhaven Residents’ Block Association has declined to support either proposal.

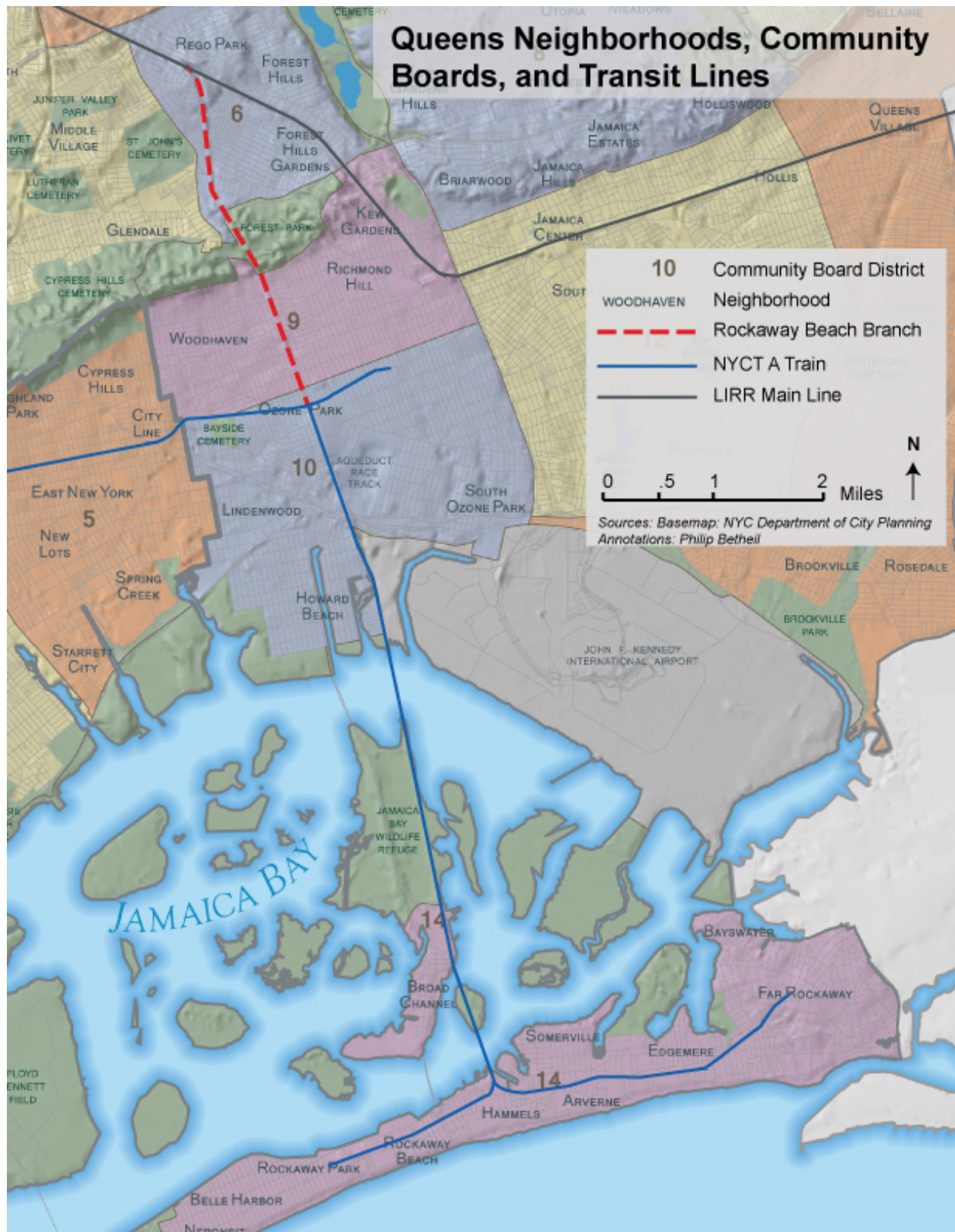


Figure 4. Rockaway Beach Branch and Queens Neighborhoods (map by author)

Actors

In order to understand how these groups interact, this next section will provide an overview of the relevant actors in influencing or deciding what happens to the Rockaway Beach Branch.

Table 1. Community Group Actors		
Group	Type of Group	Position
Friends of the Queensway	Community Group	Pro-Park
Trust for Public Land	National Non-profit	Pro-Park
Queens Public Transit Committee	Community Group	Pro-Rail
Institute for Rational Mobility	Local Non-profit	Pro-Rail
NoWay QueensWay	Community Group	Pro-Status-Quo (Anti-Park and Anti-Rail)
Woodhaven Residents' Block Association	Community Group	Declines to support Park or Rail proposals
Transport Workers Union Local 100	Organized Labor	Pro-Rail

Friends of the QueensWay

Friends of the QueensWay are arguably responsible for the recent increase in public interest in the Rockaway Beach Branch. As mentioned, in 2004 Community Board 9 passed a resolution at the behest of the Rockaway Beach Branch Greenway Committee calling for a greenway on the RBB. While the proposal did not gain traction at the time, it resurfaced in 2011 when Forest Hills residents interested in a greenway proposal reached out to the Trust for Public Land about reviving the idea. At the same time that this was happening, the idea was still circulating amongst members of CB 9 and former members of the now-defunct Rockaway Beach Branch Greenway Committee, and all of the relevant parties came together to refine the idea. Out

of these conversations came the name QueensWay, and the advocacy group Friends of the QueensWay. Friends of the QueensWay (FQW) is an unincorporated advocacy group led by a seven-member steering committee. They define themselves as “an organization consisting of thousands of people, mainly living in Queens, working in tandem with The Trust for Public Land, the nation’s leading creator of parks” (Friends of the QueensWay, thequeensway.org, “About Us”).

Trust for Public Land

The Trust for Public Land is a parks and conservation non-profit that works with communities to “raise funds for conservation, conduct conservation research and planning, acquire and protect land, and design and renovate parks, gardens, and playgrounds” (Trust for Public Land 2015, Trust for Public Land website, “Overview”). The Trust for Public Land brings planning expertise and years of experience in urban park development to support Friends of the QueensWay. According to TPL and FQW, the Trust for Public Land provides day-to-day support for planning operations while the Friends of the QueensWay are the principal agents in advancing the public outreach campaign. As an unincorporated group, FQW cannot receive grants and as such TPL has both the capability and the resources/experience to pursue grant funding. TPL has currently received grants from the New York State Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation and the New York City Regional Economic Development Council, as well as grants from private foundations. As such, the QueensWay proposal is the result of a partnership between a community group and an experienced non-profit; Andy Stone, project manager for the QueensWay at TPL, stated that this is a good model for this type of proposal, in which a staffed non-profit works to implement a community group’s plan. Currently there is one

full-time employee (Stone) and two paid interns working on TPL's side of the project, with occasional input from the New York State director (Andy Stone, *interview*).

Funding for planning of the QueensWay comes from private donors and public grants. Consultants were hired (WXY architecture+urban design and dlandstudio) for the design and feasibility study using a \$467,000 grant from the New York State Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation that was awarded in 2012. Similarly, the New York City Regional Economic Development Council awarded a \$443,750 grant in 2014 for design of the first phase of the QueensWay. Donors and private funds pay for TPL staff time for the QueensWay.

In creating the initial *QueensWay Plan*, FQW/TPL engaged in an extensive public outreach campaign. Travis Terry, a QueensWay Steering Committee Member, described the project as being “initiated by the community” and as such the steering committee took great efforts to create a comprehensive outreach process. This campaign was the result of collaboration between the FQW, TPL, and their community engagement sub-consultant Hester Street Collaborative. Both Terry and Stone spoke about the effort that went into crafting a process that would ensure that they wouldn't “only hear from the loudest voices” (Travis Terry, *interview*). Outreach took place in three venues: at five public meetings, during individual meetings with stakeholder groups (such as block associations, merchant associations, and churches) and through an online platform (Travis Terry, *interview*). Reaching out to smaller groups was part of an effort to reach first-generation immigrants and other groups that might not normally engage with community outreach programs or attend public hearings. Terry stated that FQW didn't come into the process “with what exactly we wanted,” but instead entered the conversation with set goals for a park (safety, privacy, family-friendly) that were then given form by the public participation process. He characterized the final plan that was released as being “informed by the

community.” Input on security and privacy concerns were some of the suggestions that were incorporated into the final plan.

FQW and TPL have done a very good job of establishing a narrative through their public outreach campaign as well as through a polished and informative website and savvy media outreach. This is a result of TPL’s professional experience in these issues, and reflects the political literacy and understanding that FQW possesses; two of the seven board members of FQW work in government and public relations, and three of the seven were or have been members of Queens Community Boards.

Queens Public Transit Committee

While the Friends of the QueensWay and Trust for Public Land coalition provides a unified front and a polished planning product, the same cannot be said for the transit advocates. The major proponent for reactivation of the rail line at the community group level is the Queens Public Transit Committee, while involved non-profits include the Institute for Rational Urban Mobility. As with the QueensWay proposal, elected officials have weighed in on both sides of the issue and will be profiled subsequently.

The Queens Public Transit Committee (QPTC) is a group of Queens residents advocating for increased transit service in Queens. Founded by Philip McManus, the organization has been agitating for reactivation of the Rockaway Beach Branch since its inception. The QPTC has also been vocal about restoring the Rockaway Ferry, which had been cut due to high operating costs but has been included in the Mayor’s new ferry service plan. Having been founded by Rockaways residents, the group has been most involved in transit in Southern Queens, however the group is looking to expand its reach and membership to match the connotation implied by its borough-wide name (Philip McManus, *interview*). That being said, the QPTC does draw on

members from outside of the borough, including the late John Rozankowski from the Bronx, who represented the QPTC at a State Assembly hearing. The QPTC's efforts towards reactivating the RBB have involved rallies on street-corners as well as attendance at numerous Community Board meetings, and lobbying of local organizations and elected officials. The organization has recently been more successful in garnering press attention, with many articles about the QueensWay often featuring a quote from a QPTC member. The Queens Public Transit Committee has worked extensively with Assemblyman Goldfeder and their website links to a petition that is hosted on the Assemblyman's website.

The Queens Public Transit Committee current goal is the conducting of a feasibility study or alternatives analysis conducted for the RBB as a precursor to reactivation.

Institute for Rational Urban Mobility

The Institute for Rational Urban Mobility (IRUM), a non-profit that advocates for transportation reform in New York City, has also been involved in the fight to reactivate the RBB for rail service. IRUM has been pushing for an express link to JFK from Midtown Manhattan using the Rockaway Beach Branch right-of-way for a number of years; in 2013 a Capstone project at NYU Wagner looked favorably on the notion of reactivating the RBB for a JFK Express service. While the organization has not engaged with the public in the same way that the QPTC has, the group has also been active in providing an opposing viewpoint to the QueensWay, especially in the media. The organization's founder, George Haikalis, did appear on the Brian Lehrer show along with Friends of the QueensWay Steering Committee member Travis Terry. In that interview, Mr. Haikalis stated that the ROW could accommodate both transit and a bike path, a position that Mr. Terry disagreed with. A review of the news media shows that IRUM has been less engaged on this issue in the last year than previously.

According to the Queens Public Transit Committee, more well-known and active transit non-profits have not been involved in the discussions about the RBB, these include both the Straphangers Campaign and Riders Alliance. At the January 10, 2014 State Assembly Standing Committee on Corporations, Authorities and Commissions hearing, representatives of Straphangers, Riders Alliance and the MoveNY campaign all stated that they had no positions on the reactivation of the Rockaway Beach Branch (in response to questions from Assemblyman Golfeder) (New York State Assembly 1/10/14).

No Way QueensWay

The third option that has been presented for the Rockaway Beach Branch is the option to leave it as is. The line has been abandoned since 1962, and in the intervening 53 years neighbors have become used to having a dormant rail-line abutting their properties; in some cases the dormant rail line is seen as a benefit as it provides an additional buffer between residents' backyards. In the course of the initial efforts to propose a greenway, as well as in current outreach efforts by Friends of the QueensWay/Trust for Public Land, some residents have been vocal in their opposition, given that the ROW "looms over" their properties (Neil Giannelli, *interview*). In the recent debate over the QueensWay, much of this opposition has been centered in Woodhaven, especially along 98th Street where houses on the east side of the street abut the ROW. NoWay QueensWay was founded in 2013 in order to organize neighbors against reuse of the Rockaway Beach Branch: "The mission of NoWay QueensWay is to stop both the construction of a bike trail through our backyards and the revival of rail service along the abandoned Rockaway branch of the LIRR" (NoWay QueensWay, website, "Mission"). Founded by Neil Giannelli, a 98th St. resident, it is both a loose organization and blog, composed of Mr. Giannelli and whichever neighbors were interested and available at any given time that the group

was attending a meeting or rally (Neil Giannelli, *interview*). NoWay QueensWay has been active at the community level, attending meetings of the Woodhaven Residents' Block Association, community board meetings, and FQW outreach events. In April 2013, the group hung a banner from the ROW where it crosses Jamaica Avenue, prompting a newspaper article and comments from many neighbors who turned out to be unaware of either plan for the ROW.

NoWay QueensWay has come out against the QueensWay proposal due to concerns over crime and safety (both on the trail, as well as to homes adjacent to it), financing, noise, parking, and feared diminution of property values. While members of the group have met with FQW, they do not feel that the mitigation measures (cameras, fencing, landscaping) offered by FQW are sufficient to alleviate their concerns. One factor contributing to this is residents' experiences with Forest Park; interviews with both politicians and community groups pointed to Forest Park as being poorly maintained, especially in regards to lighting, paving, and availability of Parks Enforcement Patrol officers. NoWay QueensWay maintains that lack of trust in the Department of Parks and Recreation to maintain existing parks is a major detriment to believing that upkeep of the QueensWay would not suffer similarly. While NoWay QueensWay has been primarily focused on opposing the QueensWay (as its name would imply), it is also against the reactivation of the RBB for rail service given concerns about noise and construction impacts.

Woodhaven Residents Block Association

The Woodhaven Residents' Block Association (WRBA) is a civic association in Woodhaven, Queens. In response to that various proposals for the RBB, the WRBA hosted a townhall meeting on plans for the Rockaway Beach Branch on September 29, 2012. The WRBA invited John Rozankowski of the Queens Public Transit Committee and Andrea Crawford of Friends of the QueensWay to present their positions, which was followed by an open discussion.

Based on the concerns raised at the townhall meeting and what was regarded as a lack of follow-up responses to questions that were raised at the meeting, the Woodhaven Residents' Block Association declined to support either proposal, stating that, "in light of the diverse -- and sometimes conflicting -- opinions we've received from our community, we believe that leaving the abandoned rail line alone is the best way to satisfy the needs and desires of as many residents as possible" (Woodhaven Residents' Block Association, website, "Inactive Railroad Tracks Along 98th Street"). In addition to the decision to support neither proposal, the WRBA did call on the City to better maintain the ROW.

Elected Officials

As both proposals for reuse of the Rockaway Beach Branch require government intervention at some step in the implementation process, an understanding of the political landscape is necessary.

Table 2. Selected Elected Officials			
Name	Elected Body	Constituency	Position
Joseph Crowley	U.S. House	North of Long Island Expressway (Corona, Jackson Heights, Woodside)	Pro-Park
Grace Meng	U.S. House	North of Forest Park (Forest Hills, Rego Park, Kew Gardens)	Pro-Park
Toby Ann Stavisky	State Senate	Northern Queens (parts of Rego Park, Forest Hills, Elmhurst along Queens Blvd)	Pro-Park
Andrew Hevesi	State Assembly	Forest Hills, Rego Park, Middle Village	Pro-Park
Karen Koslowitz	City Council	Forest Hills, Rego Park, Kew Gardens, Richmond Hill	Pro-Park
Phillip Goldfeder	State Assembly	Rockaways, Ozone Park	Pro-Rail
Hakeem Jeffries	U.S. House	Howard Beach, Ozone Park, Brooklyn	Pro-Rail
Gregory Meeks	U.S. House	Rockaways, Ozone Park, Richmond Hill	Pro-Rail
Joseph Addabbo, Jr.	State Senate	Rockaways, Howard Beach, Ozone Park, Woodhaven, Forest	Pro-Status Quo

		Hills, Glendale, Middle Village	
Michael Miller	State Assembly	Woodhaven, Glendale	Compromise Plan

The Friends of the QueensWay and Trust for Public Land have received endorsements from U.S. Representatives Joseph Crowley and Grace Meng, as well as State Senator Toby Ann Stavisky, Assemblyman Andrew Hevesi, and City Councilmember Karen Koslowitz.

On the rail side, elected representatives have been vocal in their support for reactivation. Assemblyman Phillip Goldfeder, who represents the Rockaways, has been particularly active, and has been working towards reactivation since his election in 2010, both at the State Assembly level as well as through a petition. Goldfeder was responsible for obtaining funding for the Queens College *A Community Impact Study of the Proposed Uses of the Rockaway Beach Branch Right of Way*, and has been the face of many a press-conference on the issue. Congressmen Hakeem Jeffries and Gregory Meeks have thrown their support behind rail reactivation as well, promising to pursue federal funding for a feasibility study.

Elected Representative support tends to vary depending on geography. In the cases where residents would most benefit from rail, local elected officials support that option (Meeks and Goldfeder in the Rockaways). In areas that are already served by transit or would not be served by new rail, support is strong for the QueensWay (Congresspersons Meng and Crowley, who represent areas in Northern Queens).

State Senator Joseph Addabbo, Jr.'s position has aligned most closely with that of the Woodhaven Residents' Block Association. The State Senator raised concerns about both proposals and at present feels that the line should remain as it is. In talking with the State Senator, he spoke to the difficulty of balancing between divergent constituent interests in both the northern and southern parts of his district, which runs the full length of the RBB. In

formulating his position, the State Senator met with groups representing all sides of the issue, as well as with the MTA; according to him, the MTA had indicated that there were major logistical and financial issues that made reactivation infeasible, hence the lack of inclusion in the most recent Capital Plan. That being said, Addabo stated that if the QueensWay or rail reactivation were to occur, he would fight to mitigate any potential impacts to constituents along the ROW in order to insure the best possible outcome.

Assemblyman Michael Miller has offered a compromise plan for the Rockaway Beach Branch. This plan would involve dedicating a short section of the ROW to transit to allow for connections between the existing A train and Atlantic Avenue LIRR, allowing riders to bypass much of the A line through Brooklyn. The section of the ROW through Woodhaven that has seen resident opposition would remain fallow, while the northern section of the ROW north of Myrtle Avenue would be developed as a greenway. This compromise solution, which the Assemblyman characterized as a “three way plan” that could “make it work for everyone” was not well received by either transit or parks advocates; with one well-known blog leading with the headline: “Rabble-Rousing Assemblyman Seeks QueensWay Compromise” (Rosenberg 2014). In an interview, the Assemblyman described the compromise solution as a reflection of the geographical nature of the debate, stating that Woodhaven residents were against either option, Rego Park and Forest Hills residents were for a park, and Ozone Park and Rockaways residents were pro-transit. Assemblyman Miller’s district encompasses Woodhaven and part of Glendale that does not abut the RBB, and he stated that he had heard from many constituents who had bought homes along the RBB under the assumption that it would remain abandoned, as well as residents who had concerns about crime. Presently, the Assemblyman has not pursued

implementation of his plan, as without solid plans and funding on either side of the issue, he sees no immediate need for action.

Organized Labor

One potential player that has had some involvement, and a definite interest, in the dispute over the RBB is the Transport Workers Union Local 100 (TWU). TWU Local 100 represents transit workers in New York City and is a force in New York City Politics. TWU has been working with Assemblyman Goldfeder's coalition to reactive the Rockaway Beach Branch, appearing at press conferences and rallies, as well as lobbying through press releases and an editorial in the *Queens Chronicle* written by President John Samuelson. Recently TWU took out a full-page advertisement in *City and State* in support of increased funding for Bus Rapid Transit, which included an oblique mention of the Rockaway Beach Branch: "TWU also supports using existing rights-of-way on rail lines in Queens to expand public transportation."

Queens College

In 2014, the Queens College Office of Community Studies (part of the Urban Studies department) conducted a study on the potential effects of the two reuse proposals. *A Community Impact Study of the Proposed Uses of the Rockaway Beach Branch Right of Way* compiled information about the communities along the ROW and provided a survey of the literature (much of which is in this paper's literature review) on the effects of greenways and rail lines on property values. A survey of area residents along the ROW as well as in the Rockaways was also conducted. The survey found that respondents ranked transit reactivation highest among options that also included greenway, rail with trail, and no development options (Queens College 2014). Interestingly, resident preferences did not align with the geographical stereotypes that

elected representative positions align with. A greater percentage of Rockaways residents actually professed a preference for the QueensWay than did Northern Queens residents, while residents in Northern Queens expressed a greater preference for transit than Rockaways residents. However, the study does include the caveat that “while these results demonstrate a preference for the transportation option, they are within the margin of error of the survey and so cannot be taken as statistically significant” (Queens College 2014, 6). The study also indicated that there are 500,000 trips current trips per day that could utilize the RBB if reactivated; this number has been seized on by transit advocates and often repurposed as a ridership projection instead.

Paths to Implementation

Transit

What needs to happen for either of the two proposals to be implemented? In talking with transit advocates, it is clear that the plan for transit reactivation is still in its infancy. While advocates are united in their desire to see transit service on the Rockaway Beach Branch, there is no specific operating or development plan that is supported by all groups. Past proposals have envisioned Long Island Rail Road service, subway service, or a hybrid Long Island Railroad/Air Train service. The first order of business for rail proponents is to have a professional engineering feasibility study conducted of the ROW. Friends of the QueensWay has repeatedly characterized the ROW as infeasible for transit, stating that it is “never going to happen,” and as such, overcoming that characterization is key to building additional support (Travis Terry, *interview*). Both State Senator Addabbo and Assemblyman Miller both spoke of infeasibility as one of the reasons they do not support rail activation. Currently, Assemblyman Goldfeder and Congressmen Meeks and Jeffries have been working in their respective legislatures to obtain funding for a feasibility study. Originally, Assemblyman Goldfeder had approached Queens

College about conducting such a study, but the Office of Community Studies had neither the expertise nor the inclination to do so, and instead did their community impact study (Scott Larson, *interview*).

An additional barrier to transit reactivation that has been cited by the Friends of the QueensWay and Trust for Public Land is the fact that the seven acres of the ROW that pass through Forest Park have been ceded to the Parks Department. In public comments, FQW and TPL have stated that seven acres of land would need to be acquired if the ROW were returned to transit service. This scenario would exist in cases where federal funds from the *Land and Water Conservation Fund* or the *Urban Park and Recreation Recovery Program* were granted to the park (or section of the park); the terms of these grants require substitution of new parkland of equal recreational and market value (New York State Office of Parks, Recreation, and Historic Preservation 2012). If federal or state funds have not been granted to the park, the State Legislature would need to approve the alienation of parkland, but no substitute land would be necessary. Given that access to the ROW in the park is fenced off, this may not be as difficult a task as would be the case if the land were accessible to the public.

While obtaining funding for a feasibility study is a necessary first step, the end goal for transportation advocates is for the Metropolitan Transportation Authority to take over the Rockaway Beach Branch for transit use. While it would not be unheard of for a community plan for a park to be implemented as a private or public park, any transportation improvement would need to be part of the greater MTA system; community planning in and of itself will not provide a viable option for reactivation. Given the MTA's underfunded Capital Program and many competing priorities, reactivating the RBB has not been seriously considered at any level of the agency. According to authority employees, while the MTA will field community input through

the division of Government Relations and Community Affairs on smaller matters (for example, moving a bus stop), it is not particularly responsive to ideas for large scale network planning.

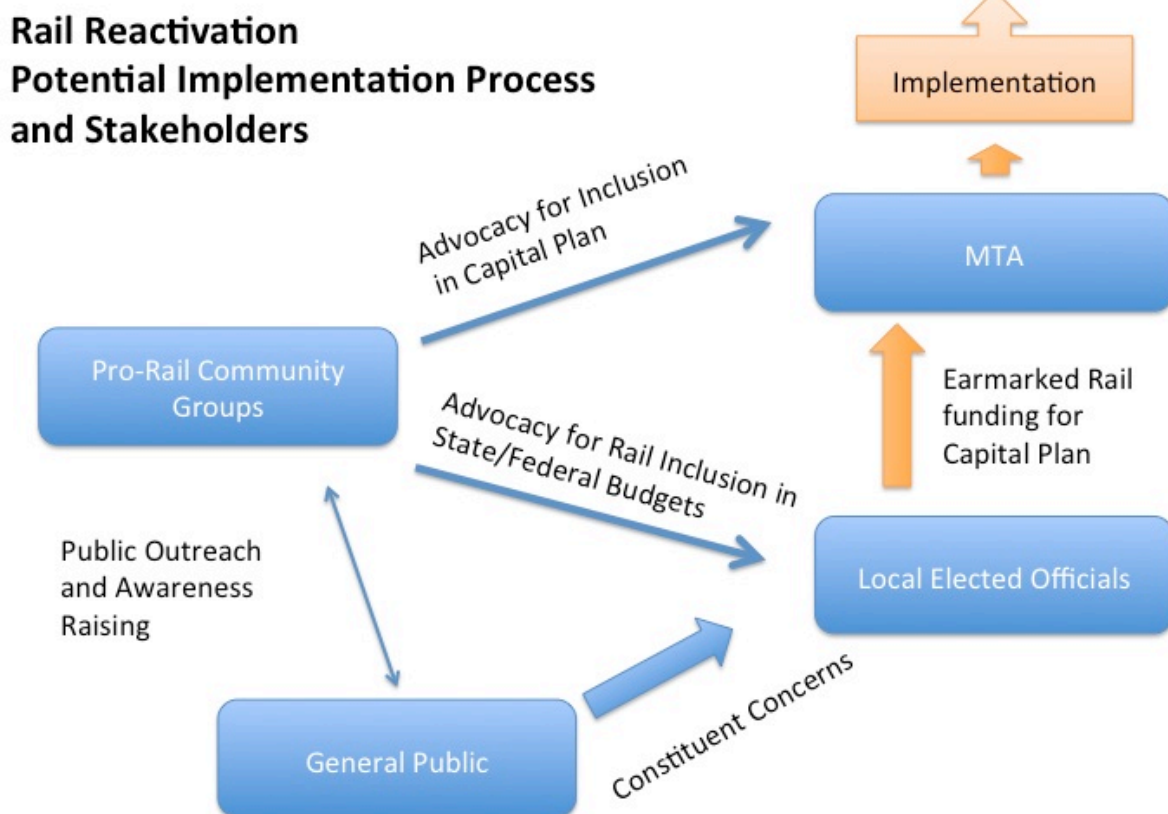


Figure 5. Rail Reactivation Implementation Process and Stakeholders (diagram by author)

QueensWay

Friends of the QueensWay and the Trust for Public Land are far ahead of the rail proponents in advancing their preferred reuse plan. With funding secured to design the first phase for the northern ROW, greenway proponents are well along their way to providing a compelling and complete vision for the QueensWay. The major impediment, according to Travis Terry of FQW, is securing the money necessary for construction. FQW/TPL have estimated that the park as envisioned in *The QueensWay Plan* would cost \$120 million to build, including contingencies. Terry has characterized this number as not “wild” in comparison to similar parks,

a contention that rail and anti-park advocates contest (Travis Terry, *interview*) (Ed Wendell, *interview*) (Joseph Addabbo, *interview*) (Neil Giannelli, *interview*). While comparisons have often been made between the QueensWay and Highline, Terry and others acknowledge that the expectation of significant private financing is unwarranted for the QueensWay. Instead, while a conservancy might be able to contribute to maintenance and operations costs, the bulk of the hard and soft costs associated with the project will need public funding (Andy Stone, *interview*). As such, the QueensWay's significant public outreach and constituency building efforts are an integral part of the FQW/TPL's implementation strategy. Andy Stone of TPL described the key to the process as finding natural constituencies for the QueensWay; these include local little leagues that use the ROW, schools lacking for greenspace, and cultural groups in need of performance spaces. Building support, from the constituent level to politicians lays the groundwork for the plan; eventually either the City Parks Department, or an independent authority (such as the one formed for Brooklyn Bridge Park) would need to take on the QueensWay plan and construct and operate it. Any of these options will require negotiation among involved actors and may be quite complex. However, the Frequently Asked Questions page on the QueensWay website provides a very matter-of-fact roadmap to implementation:

“To implement the QueensWay, the City can transfer all of the land to the purview of NYC Parks & Recreation. This transfer will not require a ULURP (the formal land use review process) since the land is already under City ownership” (Friends of the Queensway, website, “FAQ”). This implementation plan would technically result in a “park” as the land would be owned by the Parks Department, but clearly the fully implementation of the QueensWay plan will require effort and financial resources beyond the mere transfer of the land.

Queensway Potential Implementation Process and Stakeholders

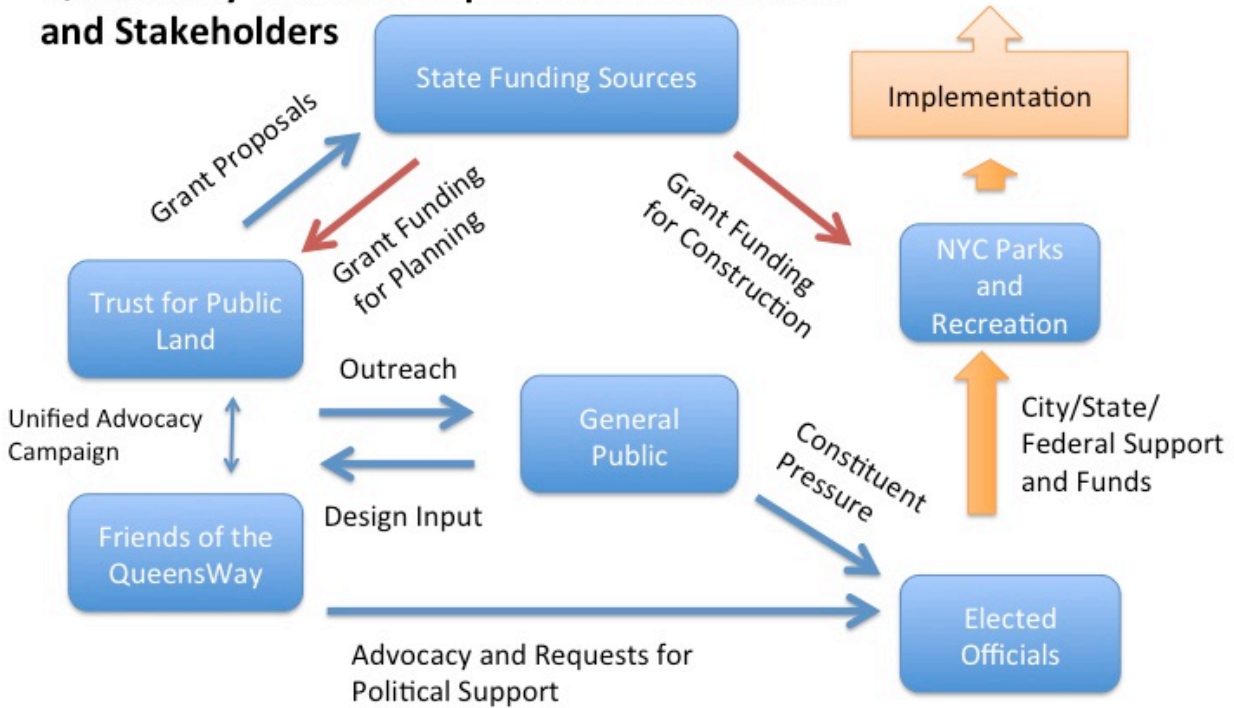


Figure 6. QueensWay Implementation Process and Stakeholders (diagram by author)

Status Quo

For those that would prefer to see neither a greenway nor transit on the Rockaway Beach Branch, success is predicated on the failure of transit and parks advocates. Making their point of view known to the public, politicians and the news media is the current strategy of status quo proponents. Given that both greenway and transit proposals require political backing to acquire funding and support, appealing directly to local elected officials is a valid and potentially successful strategy. In the course of interviewing proponents of the status quo, a common reason cited for opposition of the QueensWay was a lack of trust in the City to maintain the new park as FQW/TPL has promised it will be. This was particularly apparent in the vicinity of Forest Park, which interviewees characterized as ill maintained, and even dangerous, due to lack of

investment and upkeep. This same lack of trust in the ability of the City to maintain a park (due to financial considerations) was also apparent in conversations about the transit proposal, with many dismissing it out of hand due to the inability of the MTA to maintain its current system, let alone expand the systems in the outer boroughs.

Discussion

Friends of the QueensWay Defines the Narrative

How do these actors interact in the case of the Rockaway Beach Branch? While each actor is pursuing an individual agenda, often in partnership with other actors, what are the dynamics at play? And to restate the research question: how do these dynamics impact how the Rockaway Beach Branch will be (or will not be) reused?

With only one developed plan on paper, it would appear that the Friends of the QueensWay has effectively seized the narrative surrounding the Rockaway Beach Branch. Between the plan, a professionally designed website, and an extensive public outreach and media campaign, Friends of the QueensWay is the most organized and visible group in the discussion about the RBB. This is clearly due to their partnership with the Trust for Public Land, as well as the personal experience that the FQW Steering Committee members bring to the project given their professional backgrounds in city government, politics, and public relations.

The community involvement process that led to the QueensWay plan is a major factor that has allowed the FQW/TPL to frame the narrative about the RBB. By all accounts (including those given by opponents), the community involvement process was very effective at involving a diverse cross section of the communities along the ROW, and at soliciting suggestions for the design of the QueensWay. What the QueensWay outreach process did not do (and wouldn't be expected to do) is to determine whether residents would prefer a park to transit or the status quo.

By presenting only the parks option, and then engaging with the public about that option, FQW/TPL have framed the narrative as one in which the question is “What will the QueensWay look like?” Both transit advocates and anti-park advocates have attended FQW/TPL outreach events. While transit and anti-park advocates express displeasure that the FQW/TPL outreach meetings are not designed to allow for non-park planning, advocates very attendance at these events may lend credence to FQW/TPL claims to the narrative; even the opponents of the QueensWay have had a “say” in the process through their attendance.

By creating and perpetuating a narrative in which the QueensWay is fait accompli, FQW has attempted to move past questions of what the best use for the RBB is, and instead move to questions of implementation. Andy Stone of TPL spoke about the importance of obtaining a lead grant from a government organization as a means of establishing legitimacy; TPL was persistent in obtaining this grant even though they were rejected on their first application. The obvious professional quality of the outreach process and *The QueensWay Plan*, as well as governmental support at the state level, also project legitimacy and a sense of inevitability, a perception that makes future governmental and private support more likely. Cementing this perception is the recent Economic Development Council grant for the design of the first phase; raising the question: why would the state spend close to a million dollars on planning studies for this project if it weren't a done deal?

Without the professional support of an experienced non-profit, transit advocates are left scrambling to assemble the money and support necessary to advance their proposal. While local elected officials are seeking funding for a transit feasibility study, the transit advocates have not presented the united front and polished planning products that are the hallmark of the Friends of the QueensWay and Trust for Public Land campaign.

Direct Engagement

Realizing that all three proposals are mutually exclusive (for the most part), a common strategy taken by proponents of each option is to directly engage with the specifics of opposing plans. By attacking specific proposals, or claiming that they are unnecessary, groups can bolster their proposal in both the public debate and in private efforts to sway political and agency will. Rhetorically, FQW/TPL and transit advocates both agree that parks and transit are pressing needs for New York City, it is only on how the RBB should be reused that they disagree.

For opponents of rail, the allegation that reactivating the rail line is infeasible is a common refrain. Both FQW/TPL and NoWay QueensWay have raised this issue in critiquing plans for rail reactivation. Currently the Department of Transportation and New York City Transit are considering implementing a Select Bus Service (SBS) route directly to the east along Woodhaven Boulevard; this route would parallel the RBB for its entire length. FQW/TPL has posited that the Woodhaven Boulevard SBS route renders rail reactivation unnecessary, while transit advocates insist that SBS is a poor replacement for a dedicated rail line. This is an effective rhetorical device, as it allows parks proponents to position themselves as transit advocates as they support transit improvements that would render transit reactivation unnecessary. The same distrust of the government's ability to provide stable funding for parks occurs in the transit context as well. During a State Assembly Hearing, Assemblyman Goldfeder voiced the concern that a promise of bus rapid transit is subject to the whims of budget-makers where rail activation would not be: "And you and I [*speaking to the committee*] both know that even if we put in bus rapid transit tomorrow, next month it could be gone. Infrastructure, you can't take away" (State Assembly 1/10/2014).

On the other side, both transit and status quo proponents have also made the argument that a new park is either unnecessary or unsustainable. Similarly to the allegation that local and

state government are unable to sustainably fund transit is the argument that local government is unable to fund parks properly. NoWay QueensWay, the Woodhaven Residents' Block Association, and politicians holding similar positions, have voiced this sentiment. Forest Park is often cited as an example of a park that is underfunded and in poor condition. Ed Wendell, of the Woodhaven Residents' Block Association, commented that the Block Association was worried that if the QueensWay were built, residents would be complaining about the same maintenance issues in ten years time that are currently an issue in Forest Park.

Rail proponents, especially those from the Rockaways, have made the argument that given Forest Park's size, areas along the ROW are not underserved by parks to the extent that Southern Queens is underserved by transit. While this is certainly true for areas within a short distance of Forest Park in the northern section of the ROW, in the southern reaches there is certainly a dearth of easily accessible parkland (Friends of the QueensWay 2014).

Who has the Right to Decide and Questions of Geography

Whereas some groups have directly attacked the substance of opposing proposals, community groups have also raised questions about who has the right to make decisions or provide input about the reuse of the Rockaway Beach Branch. This gets at the geographic distribution of community groups along the Rockaway Beach Branch. NoWay QueensWay and explicitly-defined neighborhood groups like the Woodhaven Residents' Block Association have the smallest geographic reach, representing constituents along discrete sections of the ROW. Friends of the QueensWay is a more geographically diverse group, claiming members from the full length of the Rockaway Beach Branch as well as members from other parts of Queens. The transit advocates exhibit the largest geographical range, with many living in the Rockaways, which is not adjacent to the ROW itself. This is unsurprising given the nature of a transit

network, where transit links serve both local residents as well as those that merely passing through en route to non-local destinations.

Questions of geography and who has the right to decide are commonly raised by both parks and status quo advocates. Both FQW/TPL and NoWay QueensWay have contended that opponents of their proposals do not represent the community or neighborhood. In the case of FQW, the QueensWay plan is marketed as having the support of the local community along the RBB as opposed to proposals for transit reactivation that are alleged to come from outside of the community. Given NoWay QueensWay's small geographic base centered in Woodhaven, a common refrain of anti-park proponents has been that the park plan was created by northern Queens residents to benefit northern Queens residents. In conversation with Neil Giannelli, it was mentioned that proponents of the park plan whose neighborhoods have a dearth of parkland willingly chose to move to these areas, and through FQW are proposing to build a new park that will extend into "other" neighborhoods (and abut homes in those neighborhoods) as a means of remedying that choice. This question, about who benefits and who pays is raised by anti-park groups which see themselves as bearing the brunt of park impacts while the majority of park users will not. This is in keeping with Netusil's study, which found that homes within 200 feet of a greenway saw declines in property value. Similarly, for transit purposes, there is the possibility that while home values within a certain distance of a transit station appreciate in value, the homes that are directly adjacent exhibit declines in value as shown in the Bowes and Ihlanfeldt study.

These questions about who decides or participates in land use discussions are important ones, especially in regards to community amenities like parks and transit. Both proposals for the

reuse of the Rockaway Beach Branch will benefit residents and visitors from a wide geographic area, while most of the potential impacts are narrowly focused along the right-of-way.

Legally, the City of New York has the right to decide the use of the Rockaway Beach Branch; in owning the land, the city's concerns are the "most local" to some extent, whereas all of the other actors are lobbying for their preferred option as interested non-landowners. Of course, as the ROW is publicly owned, the argument can be made that proponents of any plan are merely voicing their vision as part-owners of the ROW. The Regional Plan Association recently weighed in on the possibility of reactivating the RBB for transit service, listing various service plans for reuse but stopping short of affirmatively calling for its reactivation. The RPA does not support the line lying fallow: "The RBB is of significant value, either as a linear park or for transit and should not be held hostage by residents who do not own the right-of-way" (RPA 2015b, 49).

Reactive vs. Proactive Community Organizing

Community group organizing on each side of the issue fall along a spectrum from proactive to reactive campaigns. Where those groups fall affects the tenor of community organizing efforts, as well as the strategies that each group employs. The QueensWay proposal is a proactive one; it is a coalition that has been built around a new idea, and that was formed to enact that idea. Rail proposals are in the middle of this spectrum, while ideas for rail reactivation have been floated in years past, the current iteration has clearly mobilized as a reaction to the QueensWay. Andy Stone of the Trust for Public Land noted that rail proponents have become more active as they react to the QueensWay plan and the public groundswell and media coverage associated with it. The QueensWay has done more to publicize the Rockaway Beach Branch right-of-way than rail advocates have done in decades. While the transit advocates have

organized in reaction to the QueensWay plan, their plans for reactivation are also proactive in nature; offering their own vision for reuse of the ROW. NoWay QueensWay is a community group that has formed reactively. It is a response to the QueensWay and rail plans, and where each of those groups is pushing for the success of their reuse option, opponents are instead pushing for the failure of both. This leads to a very different tenor of public conversation due to divergent goals; where rail and trail proponents are seeking to build coalitions and secure buy-in from relevant actors, opponents instead focus on poking holes in both plans and raising concerns about the impacts of the plans.

Local vs. Regional Scale Planning

At this time, planning for the Rockaway Beach Branch is taking place at the community and borough-wide scales. These proposals can be seen as examples of community planning, where locally sourced ideas and plans are vetted and discussed. Indeed, very few of the governmental and non-profit groups that could implement these plans have chosen to become involved in these discussions, and in the vacuum that exists in the absence of top-down planning a healthy public debate has flourished. There is the question though, at which scale should planning for these issues take place? While park planning is a natural fit for community planning given that most parks serve a small geographic area, it may be problematic for transit planning. Whereas the benefit of a new park may be locally concentrated, the benefits of transit improvements tend to accrue over a wider area. In the case of reactivating the Rockaway Beach Branch, while residents in close proximity to the ROW will benefit, the largest benefits will most likely be for residents of the Rockaways who will experience a faster trip to Manhattan, and for riders transiting between Northern and Southern Queens. As such, community scale planning may not capture the desires of geographically dispersed beneficiaries of transit reactivation.

Who is Left Out of the Debate?

Just as community groups use geographic locality to assert their right to speak on land use issues, issues of class and socioeconomic status are also at play. In speaking about the FQW as a group based in Northern Queens, NoWay QueensWay makes both a geographic as well as a class claim: that the people that support the QueensWay are of a more privileged and affluent background than Woodhaven (a traditionally middle-class enclave), and are attempting to impose their viewpoint and lifestyle physically through the QueensWay. Whether this is true or not, NoWay QueensWay is not the first group to question whether FQW speaks for all residents along the Rockaway Beach Branch. Scott Larson, Director of the Office of Community Studies at Queens College, acknowledges that FQW is a grassroots campaign in the sense that members are residents of the area, but that this campaign does not fully include the full diversity of communities along the route. In touting the economic development benefits of the QueensWay ala the High Line process, Larson sees FQW as a privileged group with the spatial capital to reframe the narrative in their image; pushing “a plan for a heavily programmed public space whose chief function is to encourage consumption and provide a foothold for other forms of capital accumulation” (Larson 2015, 14). Larson argues that based on the Queens College *Community Impact* study, the economic development that will accrue to the areas surrounding the QueensWay will not be shared equally. One of the findings of the *Community Impact* study was that communities of color along the ROW exhibit lower rates of homeownership and lower levels of income and wealth than whites. These residents would be disproportionately affected by rising property values along the QueensWay and concurrent rises in rent, leading to gentrification and displacement. These are critical issues in assessing claims by any community group that they speak for the entire community, or that their preferred option would benefit all residents equally.

STATEN ISLAND'S NORTH SHORE LINE

History

The Staten Island Railway North Shore Line is a five mile long abandoned right-of-way that connects St. George and Arlington on Staten Island. Originally built in 1890, the line saw both freight and passenger service between St. George and New Jersey. Passenger service ended in 1953, while freight service continued through 1989.

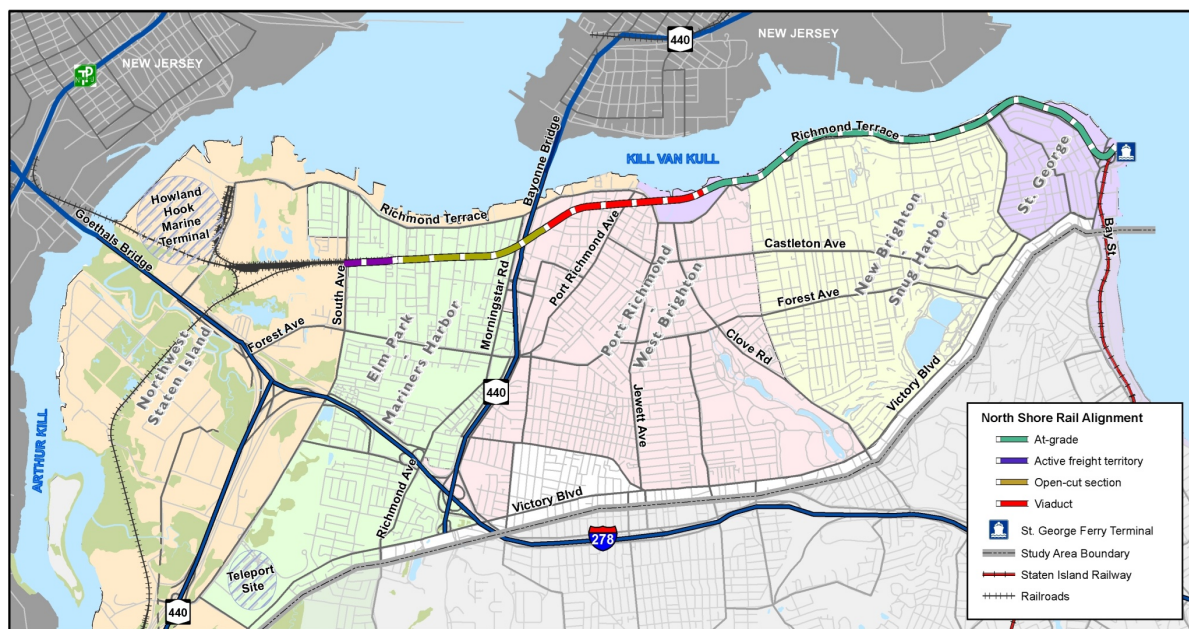


Figure 7. North Shore Alignment (MTA 2012)

As shown in Figure 7, the right-of-way hugs the shoreline at grade for roughly half of the route, with the rest of the ROW being located in open cuts or elevated on the inland portion. Since the cessation of passenger service along the North Shore Line the population of surrounding neighborhoods has significantly increased. The North Shore of Staten Island is twice as densely populated as the rest of the island, and “over a third of residents take transit to work, relying entirely on buses” (Kazis 2012).

The concept of reviving the North Shore Line for transit service has been on the drawing boards since the 1990s when the City of New York bought the line from CSX. In the early 2000s Borough President Guy Molinari pushed the Port Authority of New York and New Jersey to conduct a feasibility study of reusing the right-of-way for transit service, which was completed in 2004. This study found that transit would be feasible, and called for an alternatives analysis to determine the most appropriate mode. At all steps of this process, local non-profits including the Staten Island Chamber of Commerce, Staten Island Economic Development, and the Borough President's Office were pressuring local elected officials, as well as elected officials at the state and federal levels, to advance plans for the North Shore Line.

In 2012, the MTA completed an alternatives analysis that determined that a Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) system on the elevated right-of-way would best service the area's needs, and set the price tag for the system at \$365 million. Staten Island elected officials and the Staten Island Economic Development Corporation and Staten Island Chamber of Commerce have all lobbied for construction of the BRT line. This elected and non-profit pressure was to no avail as it was not included in the MTA's next 5-year capital plan (which is over \$30 billion in size). Unlike the QueensWay, which has been the subject of extensive press and public participation, the discussion of the North Shore BRT proposal has taken place primarily in private among elected officials and the MTA.

Table 3. North Shore Line Actors		
Actor	Type of Group	Position
Staten Island Chamber of Commerce	Local Non-profit	Pro-Rail Reactivation
Staten Island Economic Development Corporation	Local Non-profit	Pro-Rail Reactivation
New York League of Conservation Voters	State Non-profit (affiliated with national non-profit)	Pro-Rail Reactivation
Amalgamated Transit Union	Organize Labor	Pro-Rail Reactivation
Metropolitan Transportation Authority	State Authority	Did not include Rail Reactivation in Capital Plan

Actors: A Cohesive Coalition

Where the Rockaway Beach Branch has fostered vigorous debate over the proper use of the rail line, the North Shore Line boasts a cohesive coalition organized around a common goal.

The Staten Island Economic Development Corporation and the Staten Island Chamber of Commerce have both pushed for development of transit along the North Shore Line since the idea's conception. This is in response to their mandates to encourage economic growth and business development. According to Chamber President Linda Baran, many businesses are unwilling to locate on Staten Island as a dearth of transit options make attracting employees difficult. For over a decade, the Staten Island Economic Development Corporation (SI EDC) has been championing a proposal for a West Shore Light Rail Transit system, which would include links to the North Shore Line. Presently, the SI EDC has been most focused on the West Shore proposal while the Chamber of Commerce has been focusing on the North Shore BRT.

A recent addition to the North Shore BRT discussion is the New York League of Conservation Voters (NYLCV). The League of Conservation Voters is an environmental advocacy non-profit. The League maintains an education fund that is used to advocate for and engage communities on sustainability and environmental issues. Generally, the League partners with local community organizations that have a local sustainability issue and offer their

expertise. The NYLCV has been working with one community organization in each borough and in fall of 2014 they began working with the Staten Island Chamber of Commerce on the North Shore BRT. The League has engaged in a civic engagement campaign, canvassing residents to gather support for including the North Shore BRT in the MTA's next 5-year capital plan, gathering over 2000 signatures on a petition that calls on the Governor to fund the North Shore BRT. In addition, the NYLCV has partnered with SI EDC, the SI Chamber of Commerce, and the Amalgamated Transit Union in lobbying elected officials to fund the project.

According to President Baran of the Staten Island Chamber of Commerce, all of the local elected politicians from Staten Island support the North Shore BRT, and the coalition is now working on securing support at the city, state, and federal levels.

The Metropolitan Transportation Authority is the likely funder and operator of any service on the North Shore right-of-way. Since the release of the North Shore Alternatives Analysis, the agency has declined to proactively fund construction of the project, which was not included in the latest capital plan. In addition, the agency declined to submit the project for federal recovery monies because according to President Baran "it was clear that the project would not be favorably considered" (Barone 8/24/14).

Implementation

It would appear that in the public sphere a consensus has been reached on the reuse option of choice for the North Shore Line. Area non-profits, local elected officials, and local residents (as per the petition) have pledged their support for the project. What needs to happen for the North Shore BRT to become a reality?

Obtaining funding is the major obstacle to implementation of a North Shore BRT. Either the MTA Capital Plan must be amended to include the project, or else it must be funded by state

or federal dollars. As a state agency, the MTA reports to the Governor, and as such the Staten Island Chamber of Commerce and League of Conservation Voters' campaign has focused on pressuring the Governor's office to support the project. In addition, BRT advocates have been working with their elected officials at the state level to secure direct funding in the state budget. This requires obtaining the support of state legislators from outside of Staten Island. In March of 2015, the State Assembly included \$100 million for Bus Rapid Transit statewide in its budget proposal. North Shore Assemblyman Matthew Titone sponsored the proposal, of which \$33 million of these funds would be dedicated to the North Shore BRT. Whether this budget proposal will be included in the State Senate or Governor's budgets has yet to be determined.

North Shore Reactivation Potential Implementation Process and Stakeholders

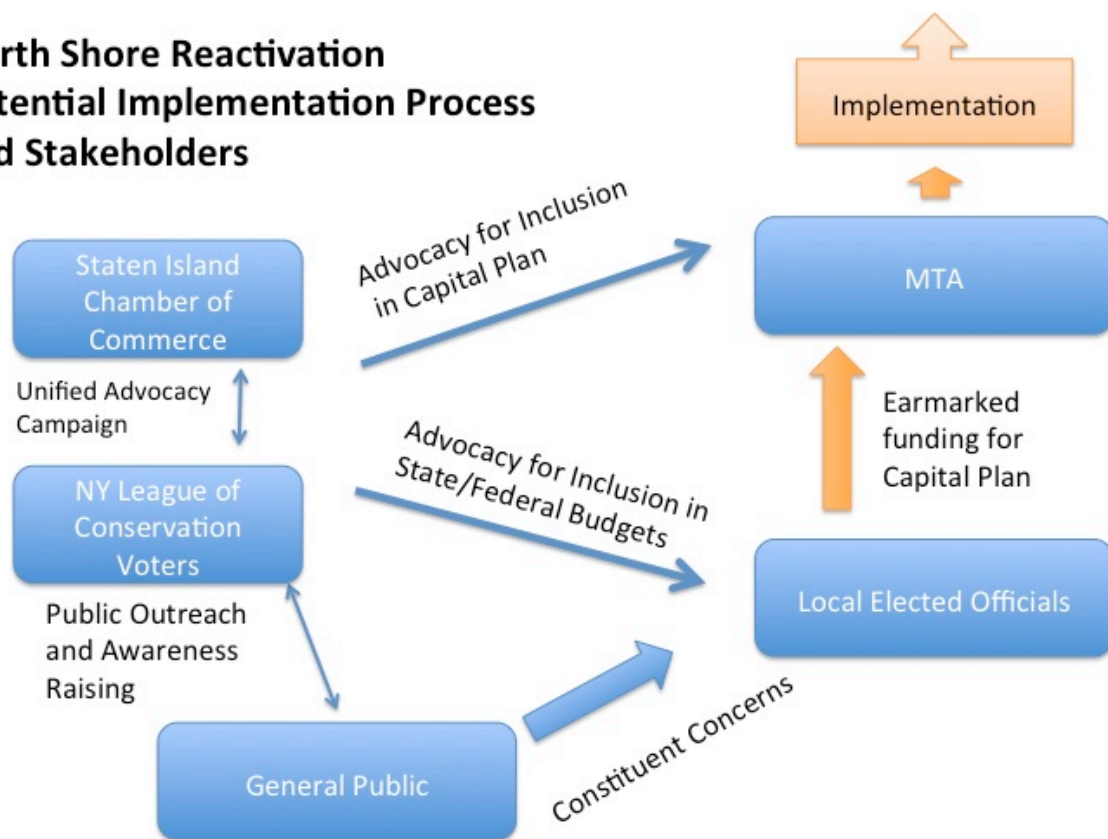


Figure 8. North Shore Line Implementation Process and Stakeholders (diagram by author)

Discussion

How do the various actors interact with each other in the case of the North Shore right-of-way? How do local non-profits interact with elected officials, and how has the BRT coalition functioned in advocating for its preferred reuse option?

New York League of Conservation Voters Expertise

A similar dynamic to the Friends of the QueensWay/Trust for Public Land coalition exists here on Staten Island. The New York League of Conservation Voters, a statewide organization, has lent the Staten Island Chamber of Commerce its public outreach expertise. This is a result of shared goals based on different motivations. The Staten Island Chamber of Commerce seeks to improve transit connections as a means of growing the island's business community, while the New York League of Conservation Voters looks to improve transit connections for both environmental and equity reasons, allowing North Shore residents both transit access and an alternative to auto congestion and associated pollution and safety impacts.

Community Involvement

The plan for the North Shore BRT is not a community based plan, but is instead an example of top-down planning; originating with the Borough President's Office and being shepherded by the Port Authority and MTA at various stages. However, while the plan did not originate with residents, it has been at the non-profit and community organizing level that the battle has been waged. There has been very little community opposition to the plan; this may be due to two primary factors: 1) the line travels along the shore through an area of shoreline industry, and 2) given the transit-dependent population that lives along the North Shore, residents may genuinely support it. The fact that the line itself does not directly abut residential development for most of its length is the likely culprit for a lack of opposition; without backyards to encroach on, there is little Not In My Back Yard backlash.

Coalition Building

One promising strategy that may contribute to North Shore BRT advocates' efforts is the building of strategic coalitions covering a larger geography than Staten Island. At the city-level, there are numerous groups working to implement Bus Rapid Transit projects in New York City. These include the Pratt Center for Community Development, Tri-State Transportation Campaign, and Straphangers Campaign. According to President Baran, the Staten Island Chamber of Commerce and New York League of Conservation Voters have been working with these groups to push for BRT citywide, including along the North Shore. This same sort of coalition building is also taking place at the state level, the recent \$100 million for BRT in the State Assembly budget would be distributed to multiple municipalities. It is likely that a proposal for just the North Shore BRT would not have garnered the necessary support from non-Staten Island Legislators.

The Alternatives Analysis as Appeasement

In speaking with non-profits involved in the North Shore BRT, and in the general media discourse, a common refrain is that Staten Island does not receive the same support and general funding for transit as other parts of New York City due to its low population and geographic isolation. One theory behind the lack of movement on the North Shore BRT by the MTA in the wake of the Alternatives Analysis is that the Alternatives Analysis was solely performed in order to "appease" Staten Islanders, and that this is a common strategy among agencies looking to placate community groups (Linda Baran, *interview*). One reason for inaction offered by elected officials and the MTA to the Staten Island Chamber is that Staten Island politicians and advocacy groups are not on the same page about a preferred project; while SI EDC is pushing for light rail on the West Shore, the Chamber is pushing for North Shore BRT. In interviews with MTA employees, this point of view was corroborated (Andy Bata and David Krulewitch,

interview). President Baran of the Staten Island Chamber of Commerce argues that the two projects should be thought of as part of a combined system and are complementary.

THE TRIBORO RX

History

As part of the Third Regional Plan, released in 1996, the Regional Plan Association (RPA) proposed building a regional rail line along existing rights-of-way through Brooklyn, Queens, and the Bronx. “Running essentially perpendicular to the existing radial subway lines,” the Triboro RX would be a circumferential line running from Bay Ridge in Brooklyn to Yankee Stadium in the Bronx (RPA 1996, 167). Using the existing rights-of-way of the “LIRR Bay Ridge freight line in Brooklyn [...], the New York Connecting Railroad in Queens, [and] the lightly used Hell Gate Bridge between the Queens and the Bronx, and the St. Mary’s Park Tunnel in the Bronx,” the project would link Brooklyn, Queens and the Bronx with minimal capital outlay (RPA 1996, 167).

Since the plan’s introduction in 1996, nothing much has come of the proposal. Whereas the Rockaway Beach Branch and North Shore Line proposals deal with abandoned passenger rail lines, the Triboro RX plan’s proposed route consists of a mix of active and unused freight ROWs. The Triboro RX plan calls the freight lines “underutilized,” with only one of four tracks currently being used for freight service (RPA 1996, 11). However, the Port Authority is in the process of planning the Cross Harbor Freight Program, which would connect to the Bay Ridge Branch and would lead to increased freight traffic.



Figure 9. Triboro Rx Alignment (RPA 2015b)

The closest that the Triboro Rx came to consideration was the 2008 State of the MTA Address given by then Executive Director and Chief Officer Elliot G. Sander, which called for a “close look” at the proposed alignment (Sander 2008).

Recently, *Overlooked Boroughs*, a new RPA report released in 2015, reintroduced the Triboro Rx as one potential option for promoting intra- and inter-outer borough transit connections. The report rehashes the case for the original Triboro Rx, with additional attention paid to the possibility of sharing the ROW with freight traffic, and a new ridership estimation that forecasts over 100,000 potential trips per day (RPA 2015b).

Actors

Discussions about the Triboro Rx proposal have taken place in the public sphere in the media, in government and non-profit reports, and through direct communication between groups. The actors that are engaging in this discussion vary from those in the previous two examples.

Table 3. Triboro Rx Actors		
Name	Type	Position
Regional Plan Association	Non-profit	Pro-Triboro Rx
Port Authority of New York and New Jersey	Bi-State Authority	Anti-Triboro Rx (due to possible conflict with Cross Harbor Freight Program)
Jerrold Nadler	Congressman	Anti-Triboro Rx (due to possible conflict with Cross Harbor Freight Program)
Metropolitan Transportation Authority	State Authority	Owens portions of the ROW, No Comment on RPA proposal

Regional Plan Association

The Regional Plan Association conducts “research, planning, and advocacy” with the aim of improving economic, social, and environmental conditions in the New York City metro area (RPA 2015). It does this through the creation of regional plans, as well as by producing reports and giving advice on topical issues. Currently the RPA is working on the Fourth Regional Plan, a comprehensive blueprint for the region’s next twenty-five years (RPA 2015).

Metropolitan Transportation Authority

As with the other two rights-of-way, the Metropolitan Transportation Authority is the obvious choice to run a Triboro Rx service. The Long Island Rail Road owns much of the ROW in Brooklyn and Queens, and the MTA currently operates all local rail services in New York City. Any reactivation of passenger service on the Triboro Rx rights-of-way would be operated by one of the MTA operating agencies. The MTA has not weighed in on the Triboro Rx plan since former Executive Director Sander's mention of it in 2008.

Port Authority of New York and New Jersey

The Port Authority is currently seeking comments on a Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS) for the Cross Harbor Freight Program. This project would build a rail freight tunnel or increase the railcar float capacity between New Jersey and Bay Ridge. If either of these options are built, they would connect to the Bay Ridge Branch, which is part of the southern portion of the Triboro Rx. Freight traffic is expected to increase if the Cross-Harbor Freight Program is implemented, which might jeopardize plans for the Triboro Rx. According to Jeff Zupan of the RPA, the Port Authority and the DEIS both dismiss the possibility of the Triboro Rx sharing the ROW.

Elected Officials

No community groups have formed around the Triboro Rx, either for or against. The Institute for Rational Mobility supports the plan but hasn't stumped for it in any meaningful way. At the political level, most politicians have not weighed in on the plan. During the 2012 mayoral race, Scott Stringer promoted the plan, while Christine Quinn promoted a BRT route that would roughly mirror the route of the Triboro Rx.

While the Triboro Rx does not have a major political champion, it does have a major opponent in Congressman Jerrold Nadler. Nadler is the chief political supporter behind the Cross

Harbor Freight Program, and has indicated that he does not support the Triboro Rx proposal: “I am a longtime supporter of increased investment in passenger rail and transit...but the Triboro RX proposal is not compatible with the Bay Ridge line” (Wishnia 2013). Nadler’s influence was apparent in 2008 when Elliot Sander announced the MTA should consider using underutilized rights-of-way for transit, including the Triboro Rx. According to Jeff Zupan, Sander dropped the issue the very next day after Congressman Nadler called to object, citing the need to maintain good relations with the normally pro-transit congressman.

Path to Implementation

Implementing the Triboro Rx proposal would require the MTA to back the plan, and provide the funding and expertise necessary to build and operate the new line. While eventual funding would be an issue, the first step is a technical feasibility study by the MTA to determine whether it would be possible to build the line, and how the line would interact with freight traffic; the interaction with freight traffic is especially important if the Cross-Harbor is built. Hashing out the freight/passenger issue would involve engaging with the Port Authority and Congressman Nadler. Physical impediments to the plan also include Via Verde, an affordable housing building that was built across a section of the Port Morris Branch ROW in the Bronx.

Discussion

Where’s the Community Support?

Where the previous two proposals for rights-of-way exhibited citizen engagement (positive or negative), there has been very little public discussion of the Triboro Rx plan. No community group ever coalesced around the Triboro Rx, and the RPA never actively attempted to push the issue. The Third Regional Plan was a large document, and according to Zupan some ideas “stuck to the wall,” while others did not; the Triboro Rx was one of those that did not. One

theory that Jeff Zupan offers is that the dispersed nature of transit benefits means that because no one community gains the lion's share of benefits there is no discrete community to organize.

Just as there has been little public organizing around the Triboro Rx, there has also been little opposition. This is not surprising, as there is no concrete plan for opposition to coalesce against. If the plan were to gain momentum, there are signs that there would likely be some backlash. This can be inferred by comments at public hearings for the Cross Harbor Freight Program Draft Environmental Impact Statement, which would lead to increased rail traffic on what would be the Triboro Rx ROW, including comments from a group that has organized around minimizing rail impacts at the Fresh Ponds Yard (Licata 2015).

A Project in Search of A Champion

With no community support, it is not surprising that the Triboro Rx was not particularly popular with politicians either. The RPA did not seriously promote the Triboro Rx in the wake of the Third Regional plan, instead focusing on projects and proposals that were felt to be more important or more easily achievable. Recently, the Triboro Rx has received more press with the release of *Overlooked Boroughs*, a new report on outer-borough transit. The report does offer the Triboro Rx as one potential option for increasing connectivity between the outer boroughs.

Freight vs. Passenger Interests

One possible explanation the Triboro Rx's lack of traction is that the proposal divides what would be its natural constituency for supporters: transportation advocates. Because the line is currently used by freight service, and the Port Authority and others have portrayed the choice between freight and passenger service as an either/or choice, transportation advocates find themselves choosing sides. As such, groups that normally advocate for both freight and transit improvements must balance the two against each other, and decide which is the more valuable

use. In the case of the Pratt Center for Community Development and Jerrold Nadler, two usual transit advocates oppose the Triboro Rx due to their belief in the importance of freight rail (and the impossibility of sharing the ROW). Conversely, the Institute for Rational Urban Mobility and the RPA argue that transit is the best and highest use for the rail line, or that it would be possible to share the ROW.

Cross Case Study Comparisons

Comparing across the three case studies, what commonalities or generalizable conclusions can be drawn?

Community Support is Useful

At the very least, it would appear that for any ROW reuse proposal to even enter the public discourse, there needs to be at least one champion. This may be a community group in the case of the Rockaway Beach Branch or a non-profit advocacy group in the case of the North Shore. While the RPA introduced the idea for the Triboro Rx, it has not been seriously campaigning behind it, and as such it has seen little traction.

Community Group – Nonprofit Dynamic

In advancing proposals for ROW reuse, it would appear that one feasible model is a partnership between a local community group or non-profit and a larger more experienced non-profit with subject-matter expertise. Both Trust for Public Land and the New York League of Conservation Voters have brought specific expertise to their local counterparts. For Friends of the QueensWay, the TPL brings decades of experience in organizing and the institutional and financial structure necessary to apply for and receive large grants. For the Staten Island Chamber of Commerce, the League of Conservation brings experience in community organizing and the manpower necessary to go door-to-door and mount a campaign to pressure legislators into

supporting the project. Only time will tell whether these models are successful in these two cases.

Dispersed Geographies of Transit May Pose Difficulties

The geographic distribution of benefits of potential reuse projects appears to affect how groups organize. In the case of pro- and anti-park organizing along the Rockaway Beach Branch, community groups formed in relatively small geographic areas, leading to cohesive place-based organizations and rhetoric. Meanwhile, transit advocates come from a larger geographic range as the benefits of transit are more dispersed. Jeff Zupan of the RPA spoke to this in an interview, arguing that geographically sparse and evenly distributed transportation benefits makes it difficult for transit coalitions to overcome geographically concentrated NIMBY sentiment. In many cases, residents may not fully understand how they may utilize a new park or transit link until the project itself has been completed, eliminating an otherwise potential base for community organizing. This is the reverse of theories of concentrated benefits and dispersed costs, where residents living adjacent to the rail line are more likely to organize given the concentration of costs and potential beneficiaries are not sufficiently motivated to organize due to the limited benefit per capita (spread over a large number of potential beneficiaries).

Contexts

Clearly, each case exists in very different contexts, geographically, demographically, and politically. And while there are shared commonalities in how actors interact, it is clear that there is no one model that describes interactions in all three cases. Where relevant actors exist, similar interactions do exist, such as those between community groups / non-profits and elected officials. The roadmap to implementation in all three cases is similar: political will must be assembled and directed towards obtaining funding and support for each project. Community organizing and

consensus-building is one influence on the political process, but consensus is no guarantee of plan implementation (as is the case along the North Shore).

The Four Stages of Project Process

One way to look at these three cases is as a continuum ranging from project proposal to project implementation.



Figure 10. Four Stages of Project Process (diagram by author)

The Triboro Rx is at the Proposal stage, where an idea for reuse has been developed and it has been released to the public. Proposals for the Rockaway Beach Branch are in the Discussion phase, where ideas have been presented and community groups, the public, and elected officials are engaged in public debate about which is the preferred option. The North Shore BRT has reached the Consensus phase, where community groups, non-profits, and local politicians have settled on a plan and are advancing that plan as a cohesive group. The final phase in this process would be the Implementation phase, which none of the proposals has yet reached.

Politics at Play

In the end, political or agency decision-making is necessary to implement any of these ROW reuse proposals. Community organizing is one method of achieving these goals. Another method is through cross-geography coalition building, as is the case with statewide BRT proposals or the tit-for-tat earmarking that is common in federal transportation budgets.

Areas for Further Research

While this thesis provides a snapshot of the situation surrounding the reuse of three rail rights-of-way in New York City, it does not answer many of the hard questions that these issues raise. One avenue for future research involves how normative values affect these issues. Is the current state of affairs desirable? Should planning for rights-of-way take place at the community level or would it be more appropriate for these issues to be resolved at a city or state level? Increasing the geographic scope may provide new insights as well; do the traits identified in New York City apply elsewhere?

Limitations of the Thesis

There are a number of limitations to this study that may affect its validity. One issue is that in all three case studies the planning and implementation process is not complete. While this study provides a history and comparison of these three cases, no link can be made between observed practices and future results. Indeed, a return to the subject at some point in the future when these issues have been resolved may be extremely telling; conversely, current process may end up having had little bearing on future results.

The interviewee selection process could have been more robust. Because interviewees were identified through community group websites, news media mentions, and personal referrals from other interviewees, it is likely that there are potential interviewees who were not identified as such. Potential interviewees who have not been represented in the public discussions of these ROW would have been unidentified, leaving their viewpoints out of this thesis. Finally, the research design of this thesis intentionally identified only community group leaders for interviews, as opposed to members of the communities themselves. This was done due to the short length of time allotted for this thesis, as well as the difficulty of effectively reaching a

broad cross-section of area residents along each right-of-way through a survey. However, the lack of community voices is a limitation, especially as there is no guarantee that community groups active in these discussions actually represent a diverse cross section of residents, as should be clear at this point.

Planning Implications and Conclusion

This thesis has shown that the interactions between community groups and other actors around the issues of right-of-way reuse are complex. Coming to consensus is one potential path towards reuse, but evidence shows that it is not the only route. For community-initiated large-scale projects such as ROW reuse, coalition building at larger scales must follow coalition building at the local level. All of the ROW reuse options covered in this thesis are community-initiated or in the case of the North Shore Line, initiated at the level of local government. These are not instances where the eventual builder or operator of a park or transit line is the project sponsor. It is posited that the process for those types of projects is quite different, characterized by public information and community involvement processes as opposed to the coalition building and political pressure campaigns associated with the Rockaway Beach Branch, North Shore BRT and Triboro Rx.

Community Involvement and the Reuse of Rail Rights-of-Way

These types of community-driven reuse proposals raise questions about a possible disconnect between citizen desires and government analysis. For local residents living along one of these rights-of-way, the eventual disposition will affect them greatly. But at the city, state, and federal levels, this on-the-ground engagement and sense of urgency does not register. Indeed, city and agency executive governance is predicated on the weighing of conflicting needs and

demands across a wide geography; what may be an urgent need in the Rockaways may be counter-balanced by demands elsewhere in the eyes of city or MTA administrators.

The crux of the matter is that community engagement and involvement in the reuse of rights-of-way runs up against regional needs and limited funding, especially when it comes to transit investments. While community groups may have built consensus around a project and garnered local political support, they may not have the political capital to obtain funding when competing against similar projects. In addition, public funding is not allocated by right-of-way, but instead by project type: Parks and Transit are two entirely different funding streams and projects compete against like projects. In the case of the Rockaway Beach Branch, this may be a benefit to the QueensWay campaign. Rail reactivation for both the Rockaway Beach Branch and North Shore Line requires each project to beat out a host of other projects that are competing for funding. Given the \$15 billion budget shortfall in the 2015-2019 MTA Capital Plan, there are fewer funding dollars than potential projects to spend them on. In this case, community consensus has little bearing on the final outcome. In the case of the QueensWay, the fight for Parks funding at the state or city level may be an easier sell.

Power and Community Involvement

As disappointing to proponents of community planning as it may seem, realpolitik may be the controlling paradigm for the reuse of rail rights-of-way in New York City. In speaking with MTA and RPA employees as well as Staten Islanders, this sentiment was oft repeated. The projects that get built are the projects that major politicians demand. The proposal for an AirTrain to LaGuardia Airport is an example of one such project that has the appropriate political capital behind it. Whereas the North Shore Line has gone through both a feasibility study and an alternatives analysis with no promise of funding, no studies or analyses were

conducted prior to the governor's announcement of the AirTrain to LaGuardia Airport; indeed the agency that will run the service first heard about the project at the press conference announcing it. In the case of the MTA, it could be argued that the Governor gets what the Governor wants.

A system of regional planning that depends on realpolitik, and the trading of geographically concentrated favors is not one that will produce forms and systems that necessarily consider regional needs. While overall region-wide planning documents such as the *Twenty Year Capital Needs Assessment* may identify the reuse of abandoned ROW as one potential option for connecting outer-borough neighborhoods, there is no guarantee that these projects will be funded. Some have described the process for allocating funding as “opaque” and “schizophrenic.” Not all projects are necessarily good ones, and as pointed out by Mr. Zupan, in funding transportation improvements in a system predicated on tit-for-tat horse-trading it's expected that some less-than-necessary projects will be built in order to build support for the critical projects. While regional planning is necessary, the final built projects will be those that politicians and agencies manage to fund.

“Bringing Power” to Rights-of-Way Reuse

These power dynamics recall Flyvbjerg's (1998) study of Aalborg and the phronetic questions provided in “Bringing Power to Planning Research” (2002). They provide a useful framework for beginning to understand the issues at play, as well as in defining a normative framework for decision-making. Of particular note to this thesis are his second, third and fourth questions:

“(2) Who gains and who loses, and by which mechanisms of power?

(3) Is this development desirable?

(4) What should be done?” (Flyvbjerg 1998, 353)

In all proposals for reuse of ROW there will be winners and losers. This paper attempts to identify the winners and losers for each proposal, and lays out the power-dynamics inherent in these conversations. Understanding how Friends of the QueensWay has dominated the narrative, how NoWay QueensWay’s concentrated geographic base strengthens its hand against dispersed transit advocates, and why the RPA needs to convince the Port Authority and Congressman Nadler if the Triboro Rx is ever to come to fruition, are some of the first steps in evaluating how these issues play out in New York City.

It is impossible to answer the third question without a strong normative declaration of what constitutes “desirable.” It is evident that community involvement in the reuse of rail rights-of-way is alive and well, especially for projects that are in the “discussion” phase of the project development process. The debate at both the community and political levels is heartening and Flyvbjerg describes this discussion as necessary in a democracy: “Dialogue, on the other hand—not necessarily detached and without combat, but with respect for other parties and a willingness to listen—is a prerequisite for informed democratic decision making” (2002, 363). Yet the existence of dialogue does not necessarily make a project worthwhile. The author would posit that dialogue is “desirable,” but that the end decisions for ROW reuse and the associated winners and losers must incorporate the needs of those who are not party to the dialogue, both within directly affected communities and those that will be “losers” if the enacting of a ROW reuse proposal displaces a more beneficial project. In many of these cases, losers end up being those with the least access to power, and as such their needs must be accounted for.

“What should be done?” Answering Flyvbjerg’s fourth question requires a normative framework just as the third question does. In the case of the reuse of rail rights-of-way, defining

who the winners and losers ought to be is one way to determine the optimal proposal. Stich and Miller's (2011) understanding of how worldviews affect decision-making is useful in this regard: establishing a well-defined and publicly stated (and potentially publicly created) metric for success and future planning can define "desirable" and therefore provide an answer to "What should be done?" Comprehensive planning and visioning are two inter-related tools that can provide that framework for making decisions about rail rights-of-way, at both the community scale, and given the transportation network effects, at the regional scale as well. Defining city needs and being able to understand what is gained and lost in each proposal is vital to just and efficient decision-making.

Whose Responsibility is Planning for Rights-of-Way?

One complaint that arose repeatedly in interviews regarding the Rockaway Beach Branch was the allegation that the Friends of the QueensWay outreach process was skewed. This was because it did not ask residents what they wanted for the ROW, but instead assumed the creation of a park and asked only for input as to what that park should look like. While certainly an effective tactic in framing the narrative, respondents raised a normative question about whether this type of outreach process is desirable or "fair". The author argues that this desire for a forum in which to express preference for ROW reuse in New York City actually implicates the lack of a planning framework as opposed to a failing in Friends of the QueensWay's outreach process. As an advocacy group with a stated agenda of creating a park, FQW is not the proper actor to be ascertaining community desires. Why would one expect FQW to do anything besides advocate for their narrowly defined interest?

Who has the right to decide the fate of abandoned rights-of-way? Should there be a system for determining how these valuable pieces of city land are utilized, and if so, what would

it look like? To some extent, it is an abdication of this planning responsibility by the City of New York that has led community groups to engage in planning for the rights-of-way in their backyards, or those that would benefit them as part of a broader transit system. While outside the scope of this thesis, one could imagine a system in which the City of New York inventories its holdings of rights-of-way and in consultation with city agencies and the public decides whether these properties could be leveraged to greater effect. This might be part of a greater public planning process, or be a stand-alone study. It may well be that holding these rights-of-way in trust for the future, as is the case today, is the best option, but without a real analysis, opportunities to improve lives in the present may be overlooked.

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